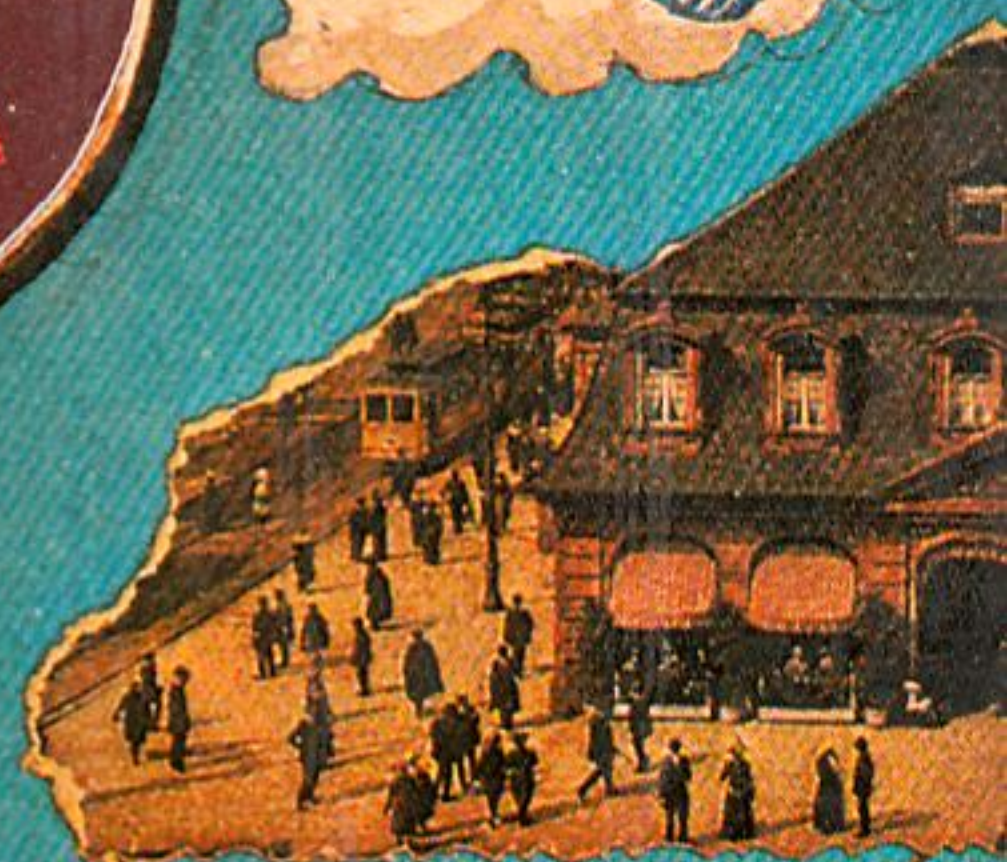


Andrei
N E K H A S O V



SOS...

THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN WRUNGEL





CHRISTOPHER
WRUNGEL

Andrei
NEKHAISOV

THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN VRUNGE



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW



Translated from the Russian by *Raissa Bobrova*
Designed by *Georgy Yudin*

А. Некрасов
ПРИКЛЮЧЕНИЯ КАПИТАНА ВРУНГЕЛЯ
На английском языке

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INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago I read the manuscript of Andrei Nekrasov's story *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel*. This was my introduction to the intrepid captain, his unpredictable companions Lom and Fooks and their sailing boat *Rage* on which they undertook a round-the-world voyage.

The world has changed a great deal since. The map of our planet is different now, Man has launched into outer space, atomic ice-breakers have crashed their way through to the North Pole. People have new joys and new cares. And a great many books have been written.

But the little yacht *Rage* has not got lost in the ocean of children's literature. Outsailing many a literary vessel, Captain Wrungel still unerringly steers his course to the hearts of his young readers.

For millions of boys and girls Captain Wrungel is as dear a hero as the boastful Baron Münchhausen, the resourceful Robinson Crusoe and the mischievous Tom Sawyer.

The first readers of *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel* are grandfathers and grandmothers now. The book's first edition

has become a bibliographical rarity. But Captain Wrungel himself has no thought of retirement. He is still doing a very important job—that of entertaining his young readers and teaching them to weather hardships with a smile on their face.

I am slightly envious of those who have opened this book for the first time in their life: they will learn a lot that is new, will come to terms with the elements and, at any rate, will have a great time.

Sergei Mikhalkov
Hero of Socialist Labour,
Lenin Prize winner



CHAPTER ONE

*in which the reader is introduced
to the hero and which contains nothing out of the ordinary*

Navigation in our nautical school was taught by Christopher Wrungel.

“Navigation,” he told us at our first lesson, “is a science which helps one to choose the best and safest sea route, to chart it on a map and to steer the ship along it. Navigation,” he added in conclusion, “is not an exact science. To master it completely one requires a lengthy experience of practical seafaring...”

This unremarkable introductory address occasioned fierce arguments among us students and divided us into two camps. One party maintained that Wrungel was an old sea wolf now retired. He did know navigation inside out and taught it well. Obviously he had enough experience of practical seafaring. Indeed, he must have sailed the length and breadth of the world.

But in any community you will find a fair number of sceptics. These asserted that our professor had never gone to sea at all. To prove their point they invited us to take a good look at him. And his appearance was in fact at variance with our idea of an old salt.

Christopher Wrungel was squat and stout, wore a grey shirt girded by an embroidered belt, combed his hair down on his forehead, had a pince-nez dangling from his neck on a black cord, had a restrained pleasant voice, smiled a lot, used snuff, had a habit of rubbing his hands together, and generally looked more like a retired apothecary than a seasoned sea captain.

So one day, to solve the argument, we asked Wrungel to tell us something about his seafaring experiences.

"Oh no, not at the lesson," he said with a smile and gave us a stiff test instead of the lecture that was planned.

When he walked out of the classroom with a pile of notebooks under his arm, he left us united in the opinion that, unlike other navigators, Christopher Wrungel acquired his maritime knowledge without leaving the safety of dry land.

I might still have been labouring under this misapprehension, had not I, soon afterwards, had the good fortune to hear from Wrungel himself the story of his remarkable global cruise that abounded in danger and amusing adventures.

It came to pass quite by chance. After that test he gave us out of turn, Christopher Wrungel did not report for duty for three or four days. We were told that on his way home that day he had lost his galoshes in a tram, come home with wet feet, caught cold and run up a high temperature. It was spring, examinations were near, and we needed those notebooks. So I, monitor of the course, was delegated to visit Wrungel and collect the notebooks.

Well, I went to the address, found his flat and knocked on the door. While I waited for the door to be opened I painted a mental picture of Wrungel lying in bed among a heap of

pillows, his nose red and running, and blankets piled on top of him.

I knocked again. Nobody answered. Then I pushed the door—and was struck dumb with astonishment.

In place of the expected retired apothecary, sitting at the desk and absorbed in some ancient book was a formidable sea captain in full regalia, with gold stripes on his sleeves. He was chewing furiously at a huge charred pipe, the pince-nez was nowhere in evidence, and his grey hair was dishevelled and stuck out any old how. Even his nose, for all that it was really red, expressed determination and valour.

On the desk in front of Wrungel was a special stand on which was perched a model of a schooner with tall masts and snow-white sails, decked out in many-coloured flags. Beside it lay a sextant. A roll of maps half-concealed a dried shark fin. On the floor, instead of a carpet, spread a walrus skin complete with head and tusks, and in the corner sat an admiralty anchor with bits of rusty chain. On the wall hung a curved sword and beside it a whale harpoon. There were other curiosities which I had not the time to make note of.

As the door creaked letting me in, Wrungel raised his head, marked the page in the book with a small dagger, rose from his seat and stepped towards me rolling like in a storm.

“Welcome to the den of sea captain Christopher Wrungel!” he pronounced in a thunderous bass holding out his hand. “Who do I have the pleasure...?”

I was quite overwhelmed.

“The chaps have sent me about the notebooks, sir,” I stammered.

“Sorry,” he interrupted me. “Silly of me not to have recognised you. It’s the illness—the memory is not what it used

to be. I'm getting on, there's nothing one can do about it. The notebooks, you say?" and he began to rummage on his desk.

At last he unearthed a pile of notebooks and gave them such a hearty slap with his big hairy hand that dust flew every which way.

"Here you are," he said, after giving a hearty sneeze. "Excellent works, all of them. Yes, excellent! Congratulations! You will be armed with full knowledge of the science of navigation as you ply the seas under the flag of the merchant marine. You will be doing useful work, and you will have a fascinating life as well. Oh, young man, I envy you the marvellous sights and delightful impressions that await you! The tropics, the poles, the ark of the great circle..." he said dreamily. "I raved of it all before I went out to sea."

"Did you go out to sea?" I exclaimed unthinkingly.

"But of course!" Wrungel replied huffily. "What did you think? Oh, I did my bit of seafaring sure enough. I performed an unparalleled round-the-world cruise on a sailing yacht... One hundred and forty thousand miles. Scores of ports, heaps of adventures... Times have changed of course. So has the international situation," he added after a pause. "A lot appears in a different light now but, as one peers back into the depth of the past, one has to admit that the voyage held a lot that was amusing and a lot that was instructive. It's something to remember and to tell the younger generation. Why don't you sit down?"

With these words Wrungel pushed over a whale's vertebra to me. I sat down into it as into an armchair, and Wrungel launched on his story.



CHAPTER TWO

*in which Captain Wrungel tells about his first mate Lom
and about certain particular cases of practical navigation*

Well, there I had been sitting in my den, and I got heartily sick and tired of it. So I decided to take a skip over high seas. And such a skip I took that the world sat back in wonder! Excuse me, you are not in a hurry just now, are you? Excellent. Then I'll tell the story in the right order.

I was much younger then, to be sure, but no greenhorn either. I had lived some, and amassed some experience too. An old bird, so to speak, well thought of and well established—according to my merits, too, though I say it myself. In other words, I could well claim a good-sized ship to command. That, too, would've been quite interesting. But the biggest ship was out on a cruise just then, and I have no patience to wait once I've set my mind on something. To hell with it, I decided, I'll make the cruise in a yacht. It's no joke, let me tell you, to undertake a circumnavigation in a sailing boat.

Well, I started looking around for a suitable yacht, and, as luck would have it, found one right away. It seemed to have been built specially for me.

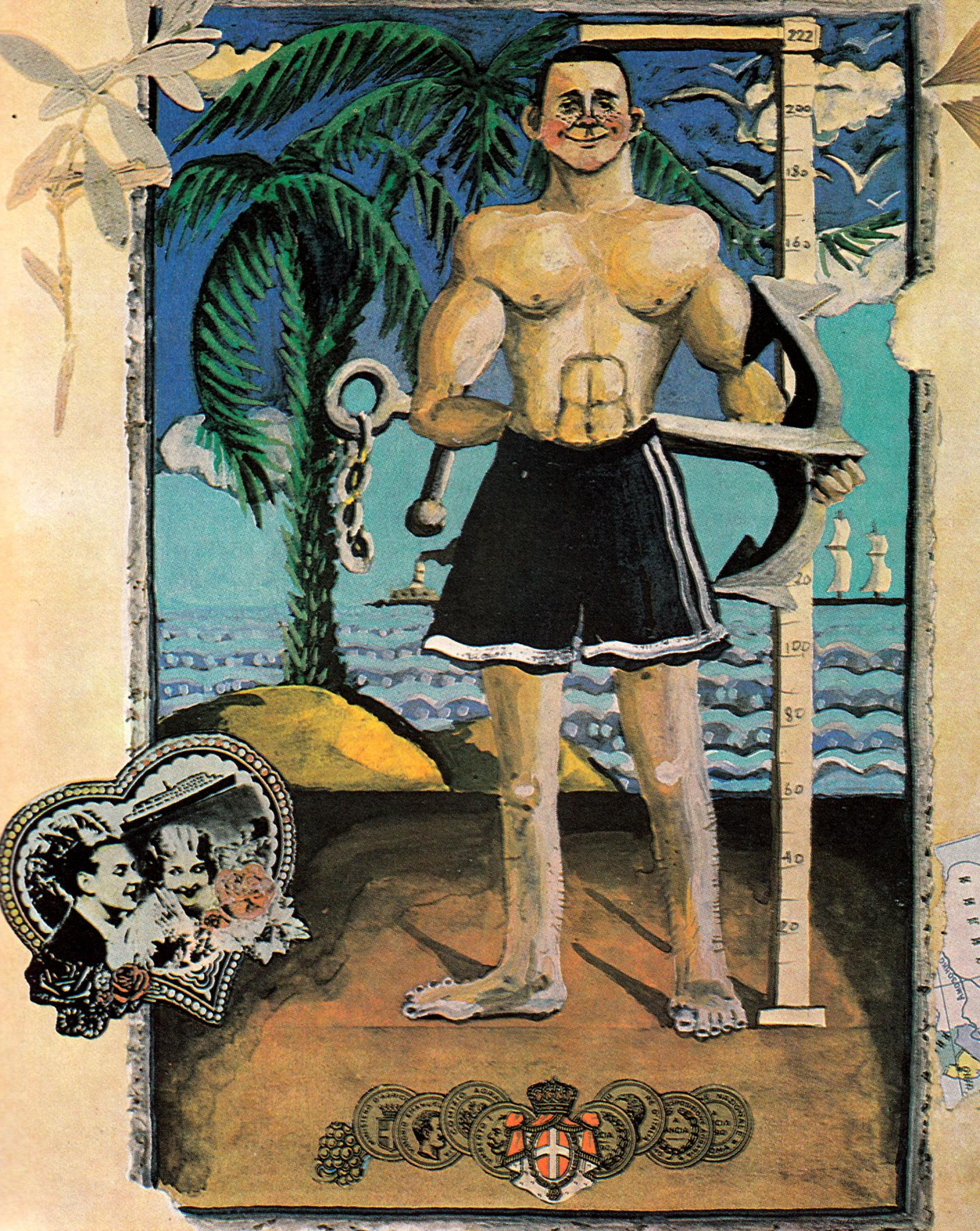
To be sure, it needed some repairs, but these were

made under my personal supervision and in the best style. They fitted it out with a new mast and sails, changed the planking, shortened the keel and built up the bulwarks. There was a lot of work needed done, but the result was a pretty toy of a yacht. Forty feet load water-line. As they say, "an egg-shell at the mercy of the elements".

I am not one to make a noise about my plans. So I moored the yacht by the shore, covered it with tarpaulin and set about making preparations for the cruise.

As you know, the success of a venture of this kind largely depends on the crew. So I took special pains selecting my mate and companion, who was to share the hardships of the voyage with me. And I was lucky in my choice. Lom, my first mate, proved to be a man of inestimable worth. Judge for yourself: seven feet six in height, a voice like a ship's siren, extraordinary strength and stamina, coupled with a thorough competence and an amazing modesty—just the stuff high-class seamen are made of. But Lom had one shortcoming—he knew no foreign languages whatever. An important omission on a foreign cruise, to be sure, but I was not daunted. I weighed up his other merits against it, pondered a while and issued an order—that he should learn English within the next month. And what do you think? Learn it he did—within three weeks.

I devised a new, original method of instruction. I hired two teachers for Lom. One taught him the English alphabet from the beginning, and the other, from the end. All went well for a while, though Lom had difficulty in mastering the tricky English letters. One of them, particularly the letter "i", caused him serious unpleasantness. As he sat at his table hammering it into his head and droning on "ai", "ai", "ai" in an ever louder voice, the woman next door began to wonder



what the matter was. She peeked into his room and, seeing a brawny chap crying out "ai-ai-ai", decided that he had gone off his rocker and called an ambulance. They trooped in, put him into a straight-jacket and hauled him off. The next day I had quite a job rescuing Lom from a loony bin. It all ended well, however: three weeks later my first mate reported that the two teachers had had a rendezvous in the middle of the alphabet and the task was achieved. At once I named the sailing date. We had wasted enough time.

At last the long-awaited moment arrived. Today our departure might have passed unnoticed. But at that time a global yacht cruise was no lesser a sensation than the Kon-Tiki trip. A huge crowd thronged the shore. Flags were streaming, music was playing—it was a grand send-off. I took my stand at the helm and commanded:

"Up the mainsail! Let go forward! Helm astarboard!"

The sails unfolded like white wings, the wind filled them, but the yacht ... remained where it was. We let go aft—nothing happened. I saw that something pretty drastic had to be done. Just then a tug was chugging past. I snatched the speaking trumpet and yelled to them:

"Ahoy on the tug! Catch the line and give us a pull, willya!"

They made the line fast and tugged and pulled, all but rearing with the effort, but the yacht did not move an inch. What the hell!

Suddenly there was a crash, the yacht jumped forward, I went tumbling, hit my head on a spar and lost consciousness for a second. When I came to, the shape of the shoreline had unaccountably changed. The crowd was no longer on dry land but thrashing in shallow waters, an ice-cream booth was afloat and astride it sat a young man filming the proceedings.

Moreover, the yacht seemed to have grown a green island overboard. I looked closer – and all became clear. The carpenters had used fresh planking. Over the summer the planks had taken root and even sprouted green shoots. As a matter of fact, I had wondered about the nice green bushes growing between the yacht and the shore. The yacht was knocked together fast, the tug was hardy, the rope was strong, so, since something had to give, the shoreline had given, bushes and all. It's a warning to all ship-builders against using fresh planking. A nasty accident, to be sure, but at least there was no loss of life involved.

I had not counted on another delay, but what could you do? We had to drop anchor and spend the day cleaning the yacht's skin. You can't go sailing with a vegetable patch of your own. If the fishermen do not guy you to death, the fishes will split their sides laughing.

Lom and I got thoroughly wet and dead tired before we were through. When night fell, I allowed Lom to go down to get some sleep and kept watch myself. I was alone on deck, lost in thought, painting to myself the joys of the cruise and trying to envisage its hardships. I got so carried away that I never noticed how the night passed.

And the morning brought me another shock. It transpired that I had not been merely robbed of a day's sailing – I had also been robbed of my yacht's name.

Perhaps you think, what's in a name? You are very wrong then, young man. A ship's name is as important as a man's. Take me, for instance. Now I have a fine name – Wrungel. And just imagine I was called something like Stumbler – would that add to my authority? Once I had a

pupil by the name of Kitten. Can you imagine a captain of a sea-going vessel named Kitten?

It is the same with ships. Call it *Valiant* or *Dauntless*, and the ice itself will part to let it through. And if you call it *Tub*, it will be true to its name and is sure to overturn in calm weather.

So I sifted through dozens of names before I selected one for my handsome yacht. I called it *Courage*. A fine name for a fine ship! I had brass letters made, polished them and fixed them up myself on the stern. You could see the word *Courage* a mile off, the letters shone so.

Well, in the morning after that ill-starred day I stood on deck, myself, barely keeping my eyes open after a sleepless night. There was no wind, the port had not awakened yet. Suddenly a motor launch, a diligent port toiler, approached my yacht and they tossed a bunch of newspapers on the deck. Vanity is of course a vice, but we are all human, and naturally I was curious to see what they were writing about us. Well, I opened a newspaper and read:

"Yesterday's mishap at the start of a global cruise might have been sent to justify the curious name Captain Wrungel has given his boat..."

I was mystified. I snatched another newspaper, then a third... And then I caught sight of a picture that featured

Lom and me on our comely yacht. The inscription read: "Captain Wrungel and the yacht *Rage* on which he is undertaking..."

I was thunderstruck. I dashed aft and bent over the gunwale. That's right: the first three letters of the name, "C", "O" and "U", were missing!

What a thing to happen! And the worst of it was that I



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REPORT
REGISTRATION

The boat sprouted roots,
so we tore off a chunk
of the shore

could not do a thing about it. Once the newspapers had carried the story, Captain Wrungel was indelibly imprinted in the minds of the readers as the commander of *Rage*. The noble *Courage* was dead and buried!

Well, what can't be cured must be endured. A light breeze rose, the sails came to life, I shook Lom awake and we weighed anchor. As we were passing along the sea canal, they were shouting to us from all ships: "Bon voyage, *Rage*! Good luck to you, pretty!"

I was sorry for the yacht's ambitious name, but nothing could be done about it. She was *Rage* now.

Soon we were in the open sea. I felt the weight lifting from my heart. It's so wonderful to be at sea. Ancient Greeks were right to say that the sea washes your heart clean of grief.

Well, we were running along nicely, the waves swishing past sides, the mast creaking faintly, and the shore dissolving in the distance. Gradually the wind began to freshen up, stormy petrels came screaming, and white crests appeared on the waves. The wind was now properly at work, whistling in the rigging, strong and salty as befits a sea wind. The last lighthouse had been left behind and sea was all around us.

I laid the course, turned the watch over to Lom and went down to snatch forty winks. As we sailors say, "Catch up on sleep while you can."

So down I went, poured myself a glass of rum, lay in my bunk and slept like a log. A couple of hours later I went up on deck, fresh as a daisy. I cast a look round ... and all went dark before me.

At first sight nothing much had changed: the same sea all around, and the same seagulls overhead. Lom was at the

helm, awake and alert, but a barely noticeable gray line of shore was looming on the horizon ahead.

And do you know what it is to sight the shore dead ahead when it ought to be thirty miles on the port side? It is a disgrace! It's the most shameful thing that can happen. I was shaken and indignant. In fact, I was on the point of reversing the course and returning to port in dishonour before I got into real soup with a first mate like this.

I opened my mouth to bark out a command to this effect, and took a large mouthful of air to make it really loud and shattering, when suddenly an explanation suggested itself. Actually it was suggested by Lom's nose. I noticed that the nose of my first mate kept turning to port, with his nostrils flaring out, and himself straining after the nose. Then I recalled that I had an uncorked bottle of rum in my cabin by the port side. Lom had a keen nose for spirits, and so his whole being was trained on the bottle.

Well, this could easily be mended. A particular case, you might say, in navigation practice, unforeseen by science. I went down to my cabin and moved the bottle to starboard. Lom's nose, like a compass needle following a magnet, turned right, and the yacht veered right too. Two hours later the *Rage* was back on course. Then I placed the bottle in the bows, and Lom never again strayed from the right course. He steered the *Rage* as straight as an arrow, and only asked once, after a particularly deep sniff:

"Shall we put on some more canvas, Captain?"

It wasn't a bad idea either, and I agreed. The *Rage* had been making good time as it was, and now it fair flew along.

We were off to sail the oceans blue.



CHAPTER THREE

about technology and resourcefulness making up for lack of courage and about putting a bad tooth to a good use

Sailing the oceans blue... Just listen to the words, young man, listen to their music.

The oceans, the spaces. It smacks of astronomy, indeed it does. You are like a star, a planet, an artificial satellite at the very least.

That is why people like myself, or my namesake Christopher Columbus, are drawn by the ocean's open spaces, promising the thrills of new discoveries.

Still and all, this is not the main attraction that makes you leave your native shores. I'll explain.

Of course the joys of sailing the oceans are great. But still greater is the pleasure of telling about the amazing things you have seen to your friends and acquaintances, of describing the vicissitudes of a seafarer's life.

But what are you likely to meet in the open sea? Water and wind, for the most part.

And what are the hazards you are likely to face? Storms, spells of dead calm, fog, shallows. Of course, unusual things also occur in the open sea, as they did to us

during our trip, but on the whole, it's just water, winds, fogs and shallows, and they are not likely to enthrall a listener.

To be sure, there are also typhoons, tidal waves, pearl fishing, octopuses and such like. It's all mighty interesting, but it has been described so many times before that no sooner do you open your mouth than your listeners scurry away like mackerel from a shark.

It's a different story with ports. There are many things there to marvel at. Each has a face of its own, so to speak.

So sailors like me, inquisitive of mind and unencumbered by commercial interests, try to vary the voyage by calling at as many ports as possible so as to see as many countries as they can. And in this respect a small yacht offers you priceless advantages.

There you stand, bending over a map, which tells you that you are passing a country you've never visited before. How do people live there? One feels one must take at least a peek at them. Well, why not? Go and take all the peeks you want! Left helm! – and the entrance lighthouse soon appears on the horizon. That's how it is.

There we were, running with the wind, swallowing mile after mile. Before you could say "Jack Robinson" the straits of Kattegat and Skagerrak were behind us. I was pleased with my yacht. It was immensely seaworthy. On the fifth day, when the fog lifted, we sighted the shores of Norway.

We could have sailed past, but why hurry? I commanded: "Helm astarboard!" My first mate put the wheel hard over, and three hours later the chain of our anchor clanged in a beautiful secluded fjord.

Have you ever seen a fjord, young man? You haven't? You have missed a great deal!

A fjord is a long inlet or bay, as winding as a chicken's track, with sheer rock face on both sides, creviced, moss-grown and formidably tall. The silence is complete. It's beautiful beyond description.

"Well, Lom," I said, "what do you say to going ashore for a look-see?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Lom bellowed thunderously, flushing a swarm of birds off the rocks, while the echo repeated thirty-two times (I counted) "Eyesore ... eyesore, eyesore..."

Now I would not call that much of a greeting to a pretty yacht like ours. Generally, the locality, as we found out to our grief, was rather treacherous, for all that it was fabulously beautiful.

Well then, I secured the wheel and went down to my cabin to change. Lom came down as well. When I was almost ready and was lacing my shoes, I suddenly felt the boat pitching forward. I dashed out on deck in a panic and a sad picture presented itself to my gaze: the bows were dipping in the water, while the stern was rising up into the air.

I realised I had made a serious mistake having failed to take into account the specifics of the bottom and, the main thing, forgetting all about the tide. Now the anchor was holding the bow down fast, while the stern was being pushed up by the rising water. Nor could we give the anchor some slack, for the bow was deep in the water and we could not reach the windlass unless we dived.

Barely had we battened down the door of the cabin, than the *Rage* assumed a vertical position, something like an angler's float. Well, what can you do against the elements? We spent the next five hours perched on the stern, like chickens on their roost. How d'you like that?

In the evening, having learned my lesson, I guided the yacht into a narrow fjord and moored her to the shore. This, I thought, should safeguard us against unpleasant surprises.

Well, we ate a late supper, cleaned up, set out the lights in accordance with regulations and went to bed with an easy heart. And in the morning, before the dawn broke properly, I was awakened by Lom:

“First mate reporting: full calm, the barometer shows clear, the temperature outside is twelve degrees Centigrade, the sounding has proved impossible due to the absence of water.”

Sleep-befuddled, I did not at once tumble to the meaning of his words and asked:

“What d’you mean ‘due to the absence of water’? What has happened to it?”

“Retreated with the ebb,” Lom reported. “The yacht is stuck between two rocks and is in condition of stable equilibrium.”

Up I went and saw the fjord had dished out a new surprise, only now, instead of the full tide we had to deal with the low tide. What I had taken for a fjord proved to be merely a gorge which filled up at high tide. Towards morning the water retreated and we found ourselves in a kind of dry dock. Beneath the keel was a chasm some forty feet deep, so we’d better sit tight and bide our time.

But it went against my grain to waste time and opportunity. I tossed a storm ladder overboard and went down it, taking along an axe, plane and brush with paints. I planed the sides where the planking had sprung up shoots and covered them with a new coat of paint. And when water began to rise,

Lom cast a line overboard and caught a few fish for dinner. So you see, one can put to good account the most untoward circumstances if he uses his brains.

Common sense suggested that we should get out of the treacherous fjord without delay. You could never tell what other practical jokes it had up its sleeve. On the other hand, I am a brave and persistent kind of man, you might even say stubborn, and I dislike having my arm twisted.

So since I had intended to take a walk on the shore, walk I would at all costs. As soon as the *Rage* was again afloat, I piloted it to a new position, quite safe from the tide, cast anchor, giving it a lot of slack, and we went for our amble ashore.

We picked our way between the rocks and the further we went the richer was the wild life. Squirrels were leaping in the trees, birds were singing lustily, and there was such primordial peace you expected a bear to walk out into a glade every moment. Underfoot there were all sorts of berries. Never in my life had I seen wild strawberries of such size, as big as a hazel-nut! We went deeper and deeper into the forest, gobbling up the strawberries and quite forgetting about lunch, and we only came to our senses when the sun began to dip westwards and it became cool. There was forest all around us, and strawberries without end. I chose a direction by the slant of the ground, hoping to reach our fjord, and we did get to a fjord, but a wrong one. Well, we built a fire and spent the night beside it. In the morning we climbed a nearby hill in the hope of sighting the *Rage* from the elevation. Climbing a hill does not come easy to a man of my build, but up we went puffing and restoring the expended strength with strawberries. Suddenly we heard a kind of noise

coming from behind us, like a wind rustling in the trees or a distant waterfall. Then we smelled smoke.

I looked round and saw that indeed the forest was on fire. It rose in a wall behind us, and all living things were fleeing from it. The squirrels were making up the hill, leaping from branch to branch, birds were screaming overhead. It was proper panic.

It is not my rule to flee danger, but this was a case when salvation lay in flight. So I sprang up and ran after the squirrels to the top of the rock—there was no other way of escape left.

Well, we reached the top, regained our breath and looked around. The position, let me tell you, was grim. On three sides we were surrounded by fire, and on the fourth was a sheer drop. I looked down and my breath caught. Goodness, you'd be smashed to smithereens. The only glad spot in this black picture was our *Rage*, swaying down below, right beneath us, and beckoning to us with her mast as with a forefinger.

The fire, meantime, pressed on. There were hordes of squirrels around us. Some had their tails singed, and they were particularly fearless, cheeky, I would say, climbing our backs and all but pushing us into the fire. That's what comes of building campfires in the forest!

Lom was desperate. So were the squirrels. To be frank I was at my wits' end too, but I did not let on. The captain must show an example of courage after all.

Suddenly I saw a squirrel scan the distance to the yacht and leap down, its tail flaring out. It landed safely on deck and was immediately followed by another, then a third, and then they went down as thick as hail. Within five minutes the rock was clean of squirrels.

Well, why, can't we do the same? I decided I would jump too. The worst thing that could happen was that we should have a dip in cold water. So what? A swim before breakfast is good for the appetite. Well, there was no time to be lost.

"First mate, follow the squirrels – full steam ahead!" I commanded.

Lom stepped forward, raised a leg ... and suddenly twisted his body like a cat and backed away.

"I can't, Captain," he said, "do what you like to me, but I won't jump. I prefer being cooked."

I could see he would really be cooked rather than jump. It's a kind of disease with some people, the fear of heights. Surely I could not leave poor Lom behind to be burnt to a cinder.

I racked my brains and sure enough I thought of a way.

I had a telescope with me, an excellent sea twelve-power telescope.

So I ordered Lom to put it to his eyes, led him up to the edge of the rock and asked him sternly, "How many squirrels have you got on deck, first mate?"

Lom began counting them: "One, two, three, four, five..."

"Never mind counting them," I commanded. "Receive the freight uncounted and drive them into the hold!"

The habit to obey commands prevailed, especially since the telescope reduced the distance to the deck. Lom jumped.

I looked down. There was a fountain of spray, and a minute later my first mate safely scrambled aboard and was driving the squirrels into the hold. Then I followed suit. Being a fearless person, I did not need the help of the telescope.

You might do well to learn this lesson, young man. If you

have an occasion to jump from a great height, say with a parachute, take a telescope along, any sort, even opera glasses will do. You'll find jumping easier when the earth does not seem so far away.

Well, so I jumped. I surfaced, climbed aboard and before I had a chance to regain my breath, Lom had slammed down the hatch and reported to me:

"Full load of live squirrels taken on! What are the orders?"

Indeed, what were my orders? It was quite a puzzle, let me tell you.

Well, the thing to do, of course, was to set sail, weigh anchor and put as much distance as possible between us and the burning mountain. I had had enough of that fjord. There was nothing else to see and it was getting too hot for my liking. That much was clear. But what was I to do with the squirrels? A good thing we had them under lock and key. The blasted beasts were hungry and had already started gnawing at the ropes. Had we left them to their own devices, we would have had to renew our entire tackle.

Of course we could have them skinned and sell the pelts in the nearest port. The fur is very good and valuable, you know. We could make a good profit too. But it did not seem fair: after all the squirrels saved us, or at least showed the way of escape. We were under obligation to them and repay them with skinning seemed a mean thing to do. I would not have it. On the other hand, to ship the merry crowd all round the world seemed rather pointless and cumbersome too. They had to be fed and tended after all. Such is the law of the sea – if you take on passengers, you must provide decent conditions for them.

I decided we shall sort it all out at home. And where

is the sailor's home? At sea, of course. Admiral Makarov used to say: "At sea means at home." That was my motto too. All right, I decided, let us put out to sea and then think about it. As the last resort I could ask for instructions from our port of departure.

Well, so out we put. We met fishing boats, steamers... Things were just fine. But towards evening the wind reached gale force. The swell was terrific. The *Rage* would climb the crest of a wave and then pitch down into the trough. The rigging groaned, the mast creaked. The squirrels in the hold were all seasick. But I was happy—the *Rage* was bearing up splendidly, showing herself to the best advantage in heavy weather. And Lom was also acquitting himself well. He had donned a sou'wester and stood at the wheel like he was cemented to the deck, his hands firm and sure. Well, I watched him for a while, admired the raging elements, and went down. I sat down at my desk, switched on the wireless, and put on my earphones to hear who was broadcasting what.

It's a marvellous thing, the wireless. You push a button, turn a knob and there you may have whatever your heart desires: music, weather forecast, news, or a football match: "The centre forward is approaching the goal, a kick—the ball's in the net!..." Well, you know the kind of thing I mean. But on that occasion I just did not seem to be able to tune in to something decent. Moscow was spelling out something like "A for apple, T for table..." and so on—just a lesson in ABCs. Dull stuff. To make things worse I had developed a bad toothache—I had a tooth with a hollow which I had not got round to filling, and after the swim in the cold sea it became inflamed.

"I'd better lie down and rest," I thought and was on the

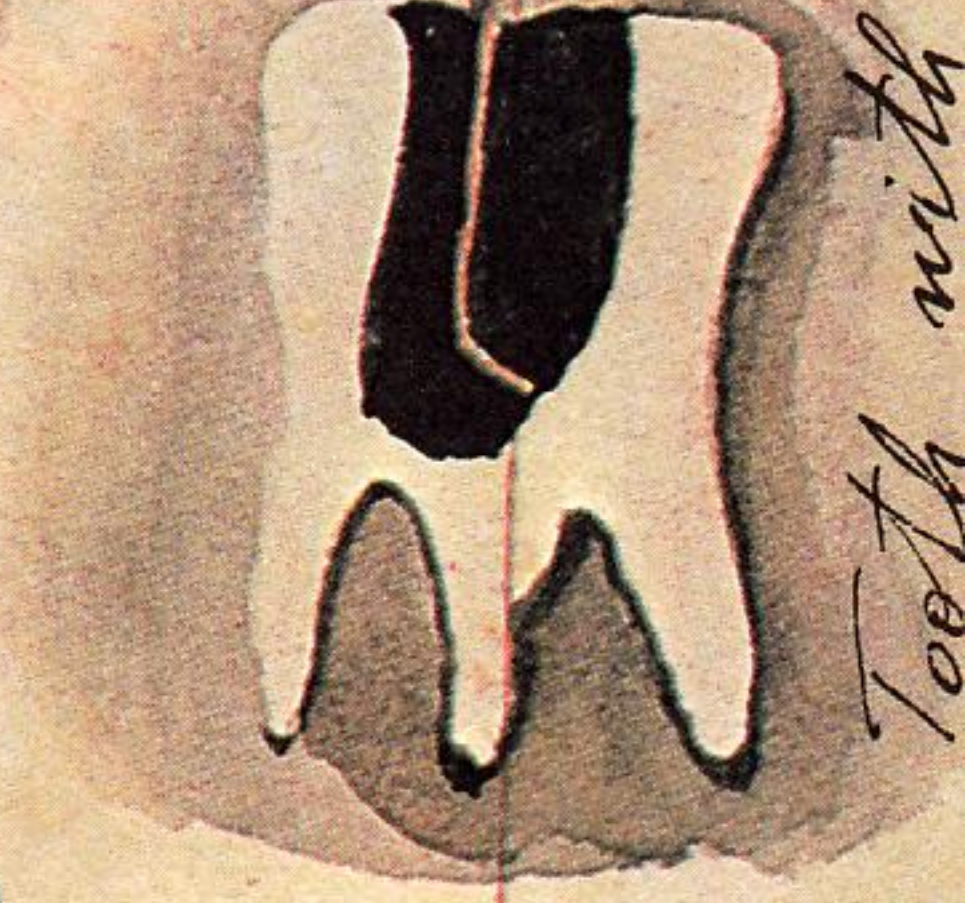
Latitude

Longitude

5° east long.
58° north lat.

Received a SOS signal on a bad tooth.

SOS..... SOS..... SOS.....



Tooth with

Aerial

point of removing the earphones when I caught a SOS signal. I listened: dot-dot-dot, dash-dash-dash, dot-dot-dot – that's right, a boat was in distress nearby. I all but stopped breathing, trying to catch the particulars. But at that moment a wave heeled the *Rage* over. The squirrels wailed in their misery.

The list sent the wireless set crashing against the bulkhead. It was so badly smashed that there wasn't a hope of putting it together again. The signal of course was lost. It made my heart ache to think that people were perishing quite close by and I could do nothing to help them. Where was I to head my *Rage*? And the tooth ached worse than ever.

And can you imagine it? It was that very tooth that offered a solution. As though struck by lightning, I snatched the end of the aerial and stuck it into my hollow tooth. The pain was dreadful, stars danced before my eyes, but I could receive the Morse signals quite distinctly. The dot was like a tiny prick and the dash was like a screw driven into the tooth. I needed no amplifier and no tuning, for the bad tooth had very high sensitivity. Of course the pain was awful, but one must be prepared to sacrifice oneself in a situation like this.

Believe it or not, but I got all of their transmission on my tooth. I took it down and translated it too. It was indeed quite close by. A Norwegian schooner had run aground, had a big hole in her bottom, and the storm was bashing her mercilessly. She could sink any moment.

Forgetting about my toothache, I ran up on deck and stood at the helm myself.

The night was pitch black, the wind was howling in the rigging, cold waves hurled themselves at our little yacht. Within half an hour we found the schooner and lit the scene

with rockets. But how were we to get the people off her? There could be no question of drawing alongside them, their lifeboats had been washed off, and if we tried to pull them across on ropes we might have half the crew drowned. I tried approaching the schooner from one side, then from another, but there was nothing doing. And the storm had meanwhile gained in strength. Waves rolled over the deck of the schooner. Wait a minute, I thought, it's a possibility.

I decided to risk it. I bore to windward, turned and went back at full canvas with a big wave.

My idea was simple. The *Rage* had not much of a draught, and the waves were as tall as mountains. If we managed to stay on the crest of the wave, we'd slip right above their deck.

The Norwegians were near to despair, and suddenly on we came, I standing at the wheel to keep clear of their masts, and Lom bending overboard and grabbing the crew by their coat collars, two at a time. I made eight trips above their boat and we hauled out all the sixteen of them, complete with the captain.

Actually the captain was a little sore, because it is the custom at sea that he must leave the boat last, and Lom in his hurry and in the darkness fished him out first. Not according to etiquette at all, but what can you do? No sooner had we rescued the last two than the ninth wave came along. There was a mighty crash and the luckless boat was smashed to smithereens.

The Norwegians doffed their caps and stood on deck staring and shivering. Well, we looked on a while, then swung about and went full speed back to Norway.

It was pretty cramped on deck, but the Norwegians did

not complain. And no wonder – however uncomfortable they were, it was much better than feeding the fishes.

There we were, with a load of saved shipwreck victims. *Rage* she might be called, but she was pretty kind to the Norwegians.

And all because of my resourcefulness. If you want to be a good captain, young man, never miss your chance, put everything to good use, even if it is your own ailment.



CHAPTER FOUR

*about the ways of Scandinavian peoples,
the city of Hamburg and the use of squirrels for propulsion purposes*

So we came back to Norway to the town of Stavanger. The sailors living in that town proved to be splendid people and gave us a warm welcome.

Lom and I were accommodated in the town's best hotel, the yacht was given a coat of the most expensive paint. They did not even forget the squirrels, making out the necessary papers to establish them as freight, and then they came to inquire what food the dear animals preferred.

How could I know? I've never bred squirrels in my life. I asked Lom and he said, "I think they eat nuts and pine-cones."

And what do you think? I know Norwegian quite well, but these two words just slipped my mind. I strained my memory, they sort of teased me from round the corner, but I could not remember the words, hard as I tried. So I sent Lom with the Norwegians to the nearest grocery store.

"See if you can find anything suitable there," I told him.

He came back and reported that all was well and he had found both nuts and cones. I was a little surprised that they sold pine-cones in a shop, but you come across all kinds

of queer things in a foreign country. Perhaps they buy them to heat samovars, I thought, or to adorn Christmas trees.

In the evening I came to inspect the painting of the *Rage* and decided to see how the squirrels were faring in the hold. And what do I see! Lom has made a mistake, but what a fortunate mistake.

The squirrels looked as pleased as Punch, scooping nut nougat out of tins. A big nut was painted on the tins. And instead of pine-cones arrived crates of pineapples. Judging by the name they are related to pines, and they do look like cones though they are a lot bigger. They have a nice smell too. Lom had seen them in the shop, pointed them out, and that was that.

They took us to theatres and museums and showed us all sorts of local sights. Among other things they showed us a live horse. It was a great rarity in Norway, for they mostly drove in cars or walked on foot. They did their ploughing with tractors and had no need for horses. They had sold the younger ones and the older lived out their days in zoos, where they ate hay and dreamed of races.

And if a horse was taken for a walk, big crowds gathered, marvelling, shouting and interfering with the traffic. It was like taking a giraffe for a walk in Moscow.

Well, for us Russians a horse is nothing new, so I decided to treat the Norwegians to a stunt. I took hold of the horse's withers, hopped on and spurred it with my heels.

The Norwegians were bowled over. The next day all the newspapers carried a photograph of me astride the horse. The horse galloped along, its tail flung out, and I was riding it without a saddle, the coat unbuttoned, the cap askew and the legs dangling.

| date | Latitude | EVENTS | registreat |
|------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| 30.V | 11° east long. 60° north. lat. | Galloped the length of Stavanger astride a horse. | |
| | | | ← Newspaper photograph |

11, rue Turbigo (3^e)
E 28-19 - Mo Temple

GUIDE SELEC
118, av. M.ine (14^e)

NOUS DISPOSONS
DANS LA REGION DE VERT-GALANT



Vieilles maisons de France
chaudes et accueillantes avec
leurs pierres qui savent vieillir
la

VIF 58-LUZY
7, rue Dr-DOLLET

S.A.R.L. AG. R. GOIGOUX

VOUS POUVEZ TIRER LES NOEL
ROIS. Autour la chem. Ds vi
rustin

Later I realised it was not much of a photograph and not worthy of a sailor, but in the heat of the moment I was even pleased with it.

And so were the Norwegians.

I must say that altogether Norway is a very nice country. The people are amiable and easy-going.

I had been to Norway before, of course, and I remember a conversation I had there with a stationmaster. I was to have a long wait for the train and wanted to get rid of my luggage, for you can't go sightseeing with two heavy suitcases. I looked for a baggage room but did not find any, so I went to the stationmaster and asked him what he advised me to do with my suitcases.

"Excuse me," he said in dismay, "we don't have any special premises, but don't let it worry you. Just leave your cases anywhere, here if you like – they won't be in anyone's way."

That's how things used to be. They are very different now. A friend of mine recently came from Norway. And can you imagine it – his suitcase was stolen right from the compartment. The ways and mores have changed a lot. You know the Germans occupied Norway during the war and established their New Order there. And today all kinds of enlighteners come to Norway to raise the way of life to their own level. So the people have grown slicker and more artful. They now understand that one should never miss a chance.

But during my visit with the *Rage* they were still keeping to their old ways. Not all, to be sure. There were some who were quite up-to-day, who have tasted of the tree of knowledge, so to speak. I mean owners of big shops, factories and various establishments. These kept their eyes peeled.

I had a first hand experience of such sharp practices. There was a firm there which manufactured telephones, radio sets and such like. They got wind of my tooth and became alarmed. Just imagine—if people used their teeth to receive radio messages, no one would need their wireless sets and the firm would sustain great losses. So they decided to buy my invention, and my tooth too.

They began negotiations in good faith, sending me a letter with the offer to buy my tooth. But I decided against it. After all the tooth was quite serviceable still, I could bite and chew with it, and as to the hollow—it was nobody's business. I have a friend who actually likes toothache.

"Of course it hurts terribly sometimes," he says, "but how lovely you feel when the pain leaves off."

So I replied that the tooth was not for sale.

Do you think they rested content with it? Nothing of the kind! They decided to steal my tooth. I was followed about by some suspicious characters who kept peering into my mouth and holding whispered conferences. I began to feel uneasy. It wouldn't be so bad if they just took the tooth, but what if they took the head along to make quite sure?

So I decided to cut and run. I sent a radio message to my port of departure as regards the squirrels and took a precautionary measure against those who had designs on my tooth. This consisted of an oaken board, its one end fitted under the gate of the bonded warehouse and the other under the door of our galley, and I gave Lom orders to take on a load of ballast.

The *Rage* sank up to the bulwarks, the board became arched like a spring and barely held under the door. Before

going to bed I examined the trap, found it was in good working order and went to sleep easy at heart. I did not even post Lom to keep watch, deciding that it was quite unnecessary. Well, sure enough, they came towards morning. I heard stealthy steps, the creak of the door, and then a thunderous bang as the board was released and straightened up.

I went out to look. Indeed, my catapult had worked splendidly. There was a radio station on the shore, and the scoundrels had been tossed to the top of its mast and were dangling there by their pants and yelling their heads off.

I did not watch the rescuing operation for I received a reply from my port which instructed me to deliver the squirrels to Hamburg, to the famous zoo kept by Habenbeck, the man who bought all kinds of animals.

I have already told you about the advantages of a free cruise. You are your own master and sail wherever the fancy takes you. But if you become encumbered with a cargo you are no better than a cabby—you drive where you are told.

Take this Hamburg place. Would I ever have gone there of my own free will? What could possibly attract me there? Their nasty policemen? There is no end of formalities involved – bills of lading, commercial correspondence, customs clearing and what not, especially if you find yourself in Hamburg.

The people there, unlike the Norwegians, are smart alects, they'll strip you clean before you know where you are.

Well, orders are orders. I brought my *Rage* to Hamburg, berthed her, put my Sunday uniform on and went in search of Habenbeck. I came to the zoo. There were all sorts of

animals there, elephants, and tigers, and crocodiles, and marabouts. There was a squirrel as well, in a cage. And it was a lively squirrel too, a cut above my lazybones sitting in the hold and stuffing themselves with nougat and pineapples. This one had a wheel attached to its cage and it ran in it with never a break. It was a nice sight indeed.

I found Habenbeck and explained to him that I had a load of live squirrels which I was prepared to sell at a reasonable price.

Habenbeck looked at the ceiling, crossed his hands on his belly and twirled his fingers.

"Squirrels?" he said. "You mean beasts with tails and tufted ears. Yes, I know. So you have a load of squirrels? Very well, I'll take them. Only we have strict regulations against smuggling. Have you got a certificate?"

At this point I thought gratefully of my Norwegian friends and produced the certificate.

Habenbeck took out his glasses and started wiping them with a handkerchief. And suddenly, out of nowhere appeared a chameleon. He jumped down on his desk, whipped out his long tongue, swiped the paper and was gone. I rushed in pursuit but I had not a hope.

Habenbeck put his spectacles back in their case and shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't buy them without a paper attesting to their legal status," he said. "The regulations are very strict."

I told him his own chameleon was to blame. But there was no moving him. So I had to go. When I came to the wharf, I saw something untoward was happening on the *Rage*. There was a crowd of onlookers on the shore, and on board the yacht I could see policemen, customs people and port officials.

It appeared Habenbeck had already tipped off the customs, they found a rule pertaining to illegal import of cattle and were out to confiscate my yacht together with its cargo.

They had me trapped. Indeed, I had no papers for my squirrels, and no official permission to import them. The story of the chameleon would cut no ice here and what else could I say? Things looked dim indeed. But at this point an idea crossed my mind.

"Very well," I said to myself, "if you throw your rules at me, I can pay you back in kind."

I pulled myself up to my full height and declared to the official in charge:

"Your demands, mein Herr, are absolutely invalid. The international sea regulations provide that indispensable equipment of a vessel, such as anchors, lifeboats, loading and life-saving appliances, signalling installations, fuel, and propulsion machines necessary for safe navigation are not subject to any port duties and need no special documentation."

"Quite right," he replied, "but will you tell us, Herr Captain, to which of the above-mentioned categories do you assign your animals?"

I had nothing to lose.

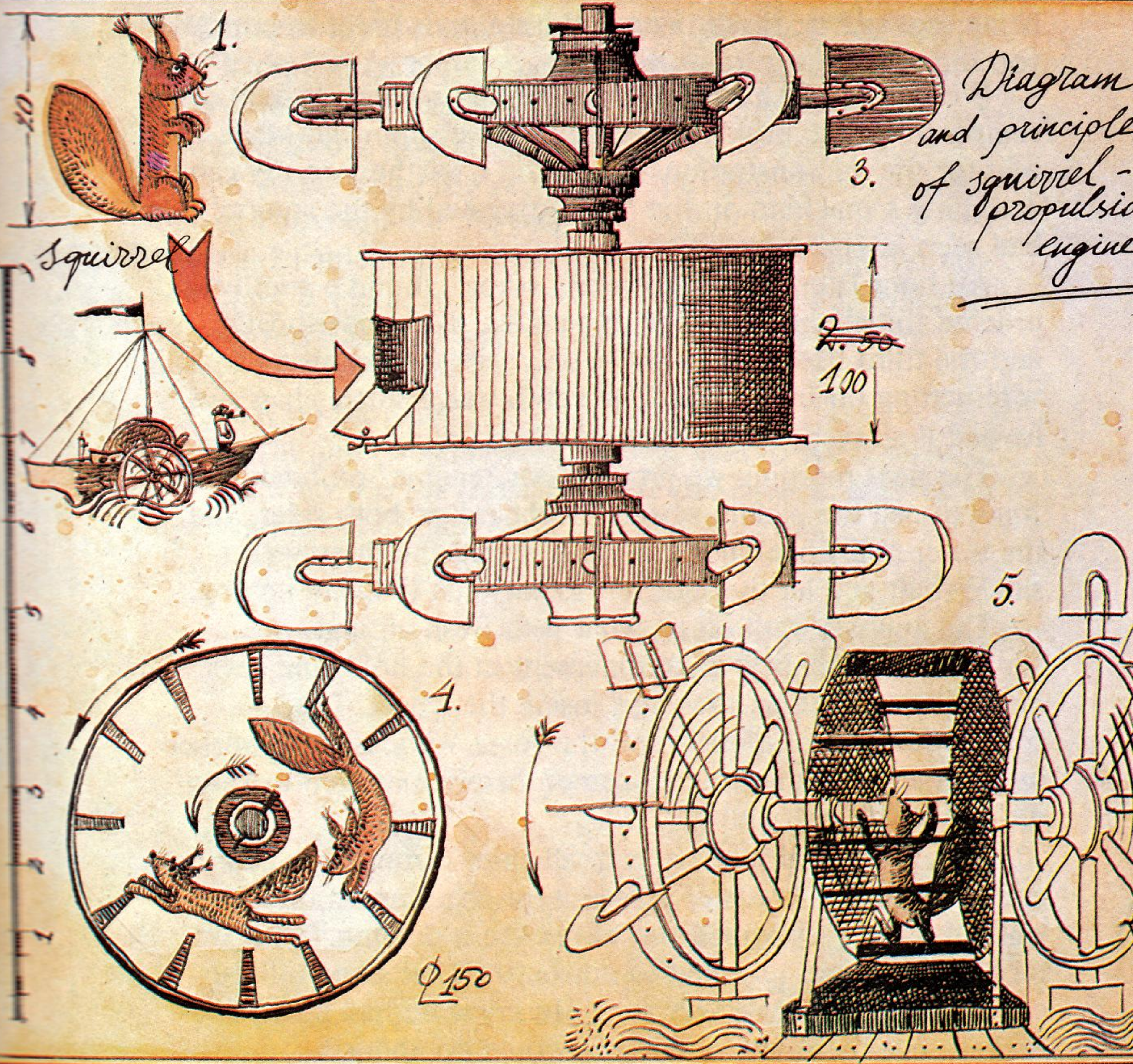
"The last, Herr Official," I announced. "Propulsion machines."

The officials were taken aback and began to confer in whispers. Then the one in charge stepped forward again.

"We would waive our lawful claims, Herr Captain, if you prove to us that the cattle on board your vessel is really used for purposes of propulsion."

There was no way of proving it, of course, but what I was after was gaining time.

"You see," I said, "the principal parts of the engine are now



being repaired on shore. You will have your proof tomorrow if you must."

Well, they left, but not before posting a police launch, its engine chugging, beside the *Rage*, lest we slip away while they wait for the demonstration. Meantime I was busy in my cabin, designing a machine on the lines suggested by the squirrel I had seen in Habenbeck's zoo.

An hour later Lom and I went ashore, found a smithy and ordered three wheels, two with paddles, like a river-boat's, and the third like a water-mill's, only with planks inside and wire netting on both sides. The smith was a smart chap and he had it all ready in no time.

The next morning we brought our "engine" on board the *Rage*, placed the paddle-wheels overboard on both sides, and the water-mill wheel in the middle, joined the three with a single shaft and let the squirrels in between the wire netting.

The animals went crazy, what with fresh air and sunshine after their long confinement in the hold, and they raced like mad along the steps inside the wheel. The contraption spun furiously and the *Rage*, without sails, worked up such a speed that the policemen barely managed to keep up with us in their launch.

They were staring at us from all ships through spy-glasses and telescopes, crowds of people were cheering on the shore, while the *Rage* skimmed the waves like a dolphin. Then we turned about and returned to our berth. That same official came along in his car, very sore. He knew he had been tricked, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Towards evening Habenbeck himself drove up in his car. He came on board, had a look round, crossed his hands on his belly and twirled his fingers.

“So these are the squirrels, Captain Wrungel?” he said, “Yes, I remember. How much do you want for them?”

“It’s not the question of price,” I answered. “The certificate is lost, as you ought to know.”

“Oh, never mind the certificate,” he said. “This is easily arranged. Just tell me the price.”

Well, I named quite a stiff price; he winced, but did not try to haggle. He drew the cheque there and then, collected the squirrels together with the wheels and asked me in parting:

“What do they eat?”

“Nougat and pineapples,” I replied, glad to see the last of him. I had no use for this character, Habenbeck, and for all of Hamburg, for that matter.



CHAPTER FIVE

about herrings and nimble hands

I had no intention of stopping over in Holland at all. There is nothing remarkable about this country except for Dutch soot, Dutch cheese and Dutch herrings.

Being a sailor I was naturally interested in these latter. So I decided to stop at Rotterdam after all and make a study of the herring business.

Well, they go for herrings in a big way there. They catch them, salt them, pickle them, fresh and even sell them live to be kept in an aquarium.

Moreover, the Dutch must know a secret. How else can you explain that no other nation is capable of catching Dutch herrings? The Scots tried, brought up nets full of herrings, but at closer inspection they proved to be, one and all, Scottish herrings.

The Norwegians tried too. They are first-class fishermen. They caught plenty of herrings, but they were all the Norwegian kind. And the Dutch unerringly come up with Dutch herrings. So they have a monopoly and they sell their herrings right and left—to South Africa and North America,

you just name the country and they sell their herrings to it.

As I studied the herring business, I made an important discovery which caused a change in the initial plan of my voyage. After long observation I established beyond question that every herring is a fish, but that not every fish by far is a herring.

What does it mean?

It means that there is no need to spend huge sums of money on putting herrings in barrels, loading them on ships and unloading them again in the port of destination. Since herrings are fishes, would it not be much easier to herd them together and drive them live wherever they are wanted?

Being a fish, a herring cannot drown, for all fishes are able to swim, aren't they? On the other hand, a strange fish may attach itself to the herd, and not every fish is a herring, is it? So it would be easy to detect it, to drive it off, to scare it away, and even to destroy it, if needs be.

And where, with their ancient method of carrying herrings, they needed a huge freighter with a big crew and complex mechanisms, the new system makes it possible for a small craft like my *Rage* to cope with the task.

This was theory, of course, but a very tempting theory. So I decided to test it in practice. An occasion presented itself very soon. A batch of herrings were to be sent to Alexandria, in North Africa. They had already been caught and were to be salted, but I put a stop to it. On my suggestion, they were let out, driven together into a herd, and Lom and I took charge of them. Lom stood at the wheel, while I, whip in hand, ensconced myself on the bowsprit and whenever I saw a strange fish worming itself into my herd, I gave it a good flick on the nose.

It worked splendidly, let me tell you. The herrings, far from drowning, swam along briskly, and it was all we could do to keep up with them. Strange fish kept away. But towards evening I began to nod. It's hard business, watching after a herd of herrings, and there's no time left for sleeping. One steers, the other minds the herd. One could stand it for a day or two, but ours was to be a long trip. Ahead lay the ocean and tropical latitudes. I was getting apprehensive. This way we'll bungle the undertaking, I thought.

In the end I decided to take on another man – a sailor. And I had the opportunity too, we had just entered the English Channel. We were within a stone's throw of the French port of Calais, which is always full of sailors seeking employment. There you can hire a boatswain, a carpenter, or a first class helmsman. My mind made up, I approached the shore, hove to, called a pilot's launch and despatched Lom ashore to hire a man.

That was a mistake, of course. The hiring of the crew is a responsible business. However painstaking, Lom was too young to be entrusted with it. I should have gone myself. On the other hand, the herding of herrings was a new undertaking and required my personal supervision as well. Suppose they scattered while I was gone. I would never make good the financial loss, to say nothing of the disgrace of it. And, most important, an excellent idea would have been compromised.

You know how it is: if you fail the first time, there won't be any second.

Be it as it may, I sent Lom to Calais, and made myself comfortable in a deck-chair. I read a newspaper and kept an eye on the herrings as well. They were grazing nicely, their scales flashing in the sun.



PRISON CARD

7001-A

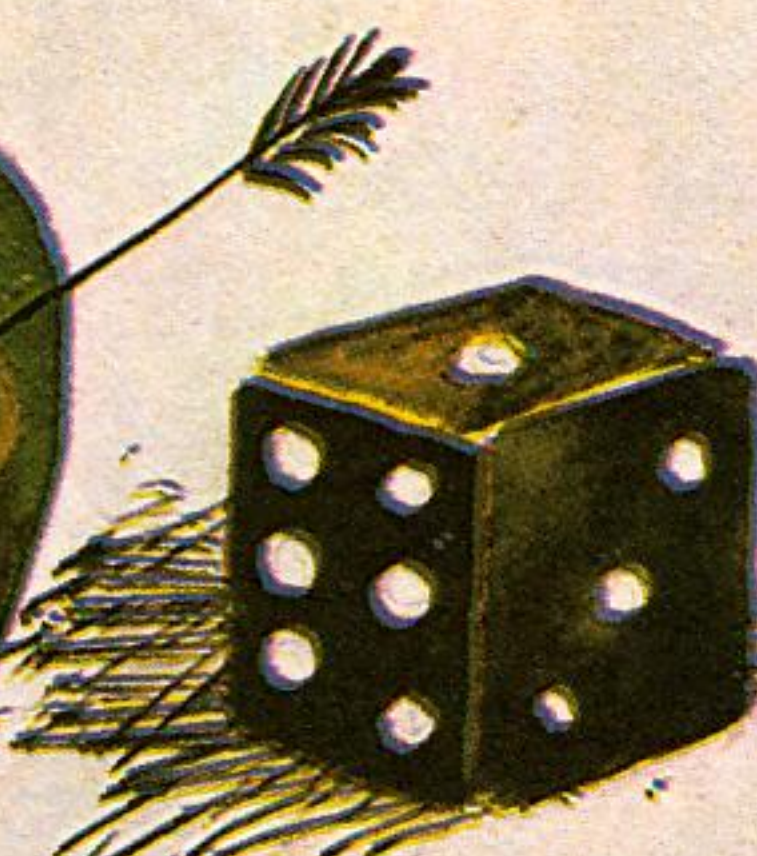
NAME

SURNAME *Fooks*

ALIAS



40-13 X109937-1E
P. 13



35000 F.
19000 F.
35000 F.
26
20
93
(21)

Lom returned in the evening with the new sailor.

The man looked all right. Not too young, but not old either. True, he was rather on the short side, but his eyes were lively and intelligent and he had a beard of an old-time pirate. Only pirates, if we are to believe the rumours, were mostly red-haired, and this one was raven-black. He could read and write, did not smoke, was neatly dressed and knew four languages – English, German, French and Russian. This was what decided Lom, for, if truth be told, he was fast forgetting what English he knew. The new sailor had a somewhat strange name Fooks, but what's in a name? Lom also whispered in my ear that the new sailor was reputed to have the nimblest hands in Calais.

Well, that was good. I needed someone who could do various small jobs that always crop up on a ship, and the tackle of a sailing vessel needs nimble hands as well.

In a word, I took him on. I wrote him down in the ship's crew list, explained what his duties would be and told Lom to show him his bunk. Then we set sail, swung around and went on our way, herding the herrings along.

And it turned out we had taken an extra man just in time. Up till then we had been lucky with the wind, which was fair and steady. But now the wind turned and hit us dead in the face. At another time I would have most probably spared myself and the crew the effort and dropped anchor. But we had our herrings to consider. They cared nothing for the wind and swam ahead at full speed. And we could not afford to lag behind either. So we had to tack. I called all hands on deck, set Lom to mind the herrings, took up position at the wheel and, when we had gained some speed, commanded:

“Ready about!”

18.VI.

2° east long.
51° north lat.

Took on another sailor,
the nimble-handed
Fooks.



There was Fooks standing idly with his hands in his pockets and watching the sails with interest.

Then I addressed him straight:

“Fooks!” I shouted. “Take in the mainsail!”

He jumped, gave me a perplexed glance and began to pull at the sheet of the sail.

“Stop it!” I yelled.

He left off and stared at me wonderingly.

I could see Lom had hired a lubber. He did not know the first thing about sailing. As a rule I keep my temper well under control, but now I was really furious.

“Why in the hell’s name did you pass yourself for a sailor, Fooks?” I demanded.

“But I am not a sailor at all,” he replied. “I simply got into a fix and my friends advised a change of scenery...”

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted him. “Why are you reputed to have nimble hands then?”

“Oh I have nimble hands all right,” he replied. “They earn me my daily bread. But not the way you think. I am a cardsharp by profession.”

My jaw fell.

Judge for yourself—what was I to do with the likes of him?

To get rid of him I had to return to Calais and thus lose another day. The wind was building up. If a storm broke out, it could be goodbye to our herrings. On the other hand, to carry a cardsharp on board like so much ballast was too silly. He did not understand a word of command, and did not know the name of a single rope. I was at a loss.

But then a brilliant idea occurred to me. I had a deck of

cards on board because I like playing patience at leisure. I tied a card to each rope and commanded:

“Stand by for a turn! Untie the three of spades, haul the knave of hearts, coil the ten of diamonds...”

The turn was smooth and beautiful. This Fooks really had nimble hands once he understood what was required of him. And he knew the cards inside out – never mistook a suit even in complete darkness.

Well, so on we went, beating against the wind. The sea was rough. I did not mind it but for the herrings. How would they behave in a storm? After all we had no fixed deadline for delivery and there was no need to risk losing the freight. I decided to take shelter in a port.



CHAPTER SIX

*which begins with a misunderstanding
and ends with an unexpected ducking*

I swerved to the right near the Island of Wight and went to Southampton. I dropped anchor offshore, left Lom behind to take care of the herrings, while Fooks and I got into a skiff and rowed to the shore. We landed in a beautiful spot: there was a lovely green lawn, paths strewn with sand and signs everywhere: "Property of Archibald Dandy. No trespassing."

Before we moved several steps we found ourselves surrounded by a throng of well-dressed gentlemen. I just could not make out whether these were Mister Archibald Dandy with his family, the Foreign Secretary with his retinue, or a troop of secret agents. When we got talking it turned out that they were ... beggars. Begging is strictly forbidden in England, but it is all right if you wear a tailcoat – then it is simply a matter of a gentleman helping out a brother gentleman.

Well, I distributed some small change among the resplendent beggars and on we went. Suddenly I saw another of their kind, long as a beanstalk. When we came abreast he took off his top hat and made a formal bow. Well, I rummaged in my pocket, found a penny and dropped it into his top hat. I

expected to receive a dignified thank you but instead the man flushed all over, snorted, put a monocle in his eye and said impressively:

“I am Archibald Dandy. Who do I have the honour of addressing?”

“Sea captain Christopher Wrungel,” I introduced myself.

“Pleased to meet you, ” he said. “Defend yourself, Captain!”

I tried to apologise, but he would not listen. His dander was up good and proper. He set his top hat on the lawn, took off his coat... Well, I accepted the challenge, peeled off my coat, and took up a stance.

Fooks was equal to the occasion too. He walked a little aside, and, in a proper referee manner, shouted: “Seconds, out! Gong! Box!”

Mister Dandy started hopping around me, flailing his fists and puffing like boys puff when they play locomotives. Then he went into attack. I swung my fist – and barely stopped it in time.

You see, I suddenly realised that with the difference in height between us wherever my fist landed it would be below the belt, and a foul. He, meantime, was punching the air above my head. A waste of time if ever there was one. And so the first round passed in sparring.

I don’t know what the outcome of the bout would have been if it had not been for Fooks’s bright idea.

“Hop on, Captain,” he said and bent to let me climb his shoulders. Once astride him, I felt on an equal level with my adversary, so to speak, and could let Mister Dandy really have it.

“Let’s begin, Fooks,” I said.

“Gong! Box!” he croaked from underneath me.

We pitched in.

Mister Dandy was a fair boxer. I got a good punch on the bridge of my nose, but, recalling the pugilistic exploits of my youth, I spurred on Fooks, closed in and dealt my opponent a crushing uppercut.

He stood still for a second, then closed his eyes, lowered his arms and suddenly dropped like a mast. Fooks took a watch from his waistcoat pocket and started the count. Mister Dandy did not come round until forty seconds passed. He rubbed his jaw, looked around wonderingly, saw the two of us, jumped up and began dusting his clothes.

I introduced myself a second time and apologised, explaining the reason for the misunderstanding. We shook hands, fell to talking and were soon on the friendliest of terms. He offered to show us his estate, gave us a cup of tea in his manor house, and then I, too, brought him for a return visit to the *Rage*.

Mister Dandy was delighted with my yacht and started counting on his fingers:

“Let’s see, today is Thursday, that means tomorrow is Friday and the day after tomorrow, Saturday. Mister Wrungel!” he shouted, “Providence itself has sent you! On Sunday we are having the grand national yacht race. You must win it. I’ll come with you, and Mister Baldwin’s nose will be put out of joint.”

To tell the truth, I did not at once catch on, but Mister Dandy explained it all to me. It appeared he had a neighbour, Mister Baldwin, and there was a long-standing rivalry between them in everything: their family, neckties, pipes. But the main argument was over yachts. Both were inveterate yachtsmen, and when it was a matter of yacht racing, they were prepared to lay down their lives to lick one another.

Well, Mister Dandy, a knowledgeable man, had taken a good look at my *Rage*, appreciated its lines and handiness and decided that this yacht would win in any race and in any weather.

"Do agree," he said. "It's an interesting race, and your yacht is a splendid craft, take my word of a gentleman that you'll win both the Grand Royal Prize and the Admiral Nelson Prize."

Not that I coveted prizes too much, but why not accept? The yacht was first-class, the crew reliable, and I would steer it myself. We had a fair chance of winning.

I nearly gave him my word when I recalled the herrings. Who was going to look after them? I explained to Mister Dandy that I was bound hand and foot by the herrings. He was very much upset, but then said he would arrange something. And he was as good as his word. That same day I was given permission to drive the herd into the Portsmouth Admiralty dock.

Then we set about preparing the yacht for the race: smeared the sides with lard, put away everything that could get in the way, like before a battle, bowsed the tackle taut.

On Sunday morning Mister Dandy arrived on the *Rage* in a white coat with a pipe between his teeth. He had two crates with whisky and soda-water loaded on board for the occasion of unexpected defeat, put his monocle in his eye, lit his pipe and sat down in a deck-chair on the afterdeck.

You know what a yacht race is like: a multitude of masts, sails, pennants, crowds of spectators on the shore. One gets all worked up. I am a very level-headed person as a rule, but I felt flurried too. We lined up for the start and waited for the signal. The flag went down, the sails unfurled, and we raced

ahead. The *Rage* started the race splendidly, though I say it myself. We were in far the lead, cleaving the water and I was already foretasting victory.

I led the race almost to the finish, but I made a mistake towards the end. In our complacency we pressed a bit too close to the shore, lost the wind and our sails flapped. We might just as well blow at the sails from a nostril. Lom was scraping the mast, invoking the wind, Fooks was whistling – also to lure the wind, but all was of no avail, so much superstition and balderdash. I give no credence to all these old wives' tales. The *Rage* was rocking on the waves, our competitors were almost upon us, and the first among them was Mister Baldwin.

Mister Dandy glanced back, swore, dived into the crate, poured himself some whisky and knocked out the cork from a soda-water bottle.

The cork blew out like a cannon-ball, and we noticed that the *Rage* jumped a bit forward.

Well, depressed as I was, my mind was working as well as always. It was not like me to drown my sorrows in wine. Instead I recalled a sea proverb: "There are no bad ships, no bad winds, there are only bad captains."

Well, whatever you might say, nobody would class me as a bad captain. I am certainly a good captain, though I say it myself. So I came up with an idea.

All the three of us took up positions aft and began knocking out the corks from soda-water bottles.

Mister Dandy caught on too. He produced a handkerchief from his pocket and set about giving us commands. It worked even better now that we laboured concertedly.

"After guns, fire!" he yelled.



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Three corks flew out with thunderous plops, seagulls hit by our missiles dropped onto the waves, soda-water gushed forth, and the water behind our stern churned. Mister Dandy kept up his waving and yelling and it was as grand a sight as the Battle of Trafalgar.

The *Rage* went ahead on the rocket principle, gathering speed. Soon we rounded the promontory, the sails filled with the wind and the ropes tautened and sang.

Again we were in sight of victory, which had almost slipped our hands. We passed one competitor after another, and only Baldwin was still ahead of us. Then we caught up with him, moved ahead half length, then full length... The orchestra on the shore broke into a flourish, Mister Dandy grinned delightedly, said: "Well done, boys!" and stretched full length on the deck, dead to the world.

The next day the newspapers were full of the race and our victory. Friends we did not know had come to congratulate us. But we did not only earn friends but also quite a few enemies as well.

It was all Mister Baldwin's doing. He started a whispering campaign and wove intrigues. It all ended in a lot of unpleasantness, but the unpleasantness was plotted secretly and we had no inkling of it when we went to collect our prizes.

The royal yacht-club gathered in the most solemn atmosphere in the weighing room of the old customs house.

It is regarded as the greatest honour that the prize should weigh more than the winner. They suggested that I mount the scales, but I decided I could well afford to weigh up the whole crew, there were so many prizes awarded us. So we all mounted the scales. Mister Dandy, Lom, Fooks and myself. The other scale held a whole crockery display, bowls, vases, cups,

goblets and glasses. Then they added a heap of medals and badges, and a few knick-knacks, and when the two scales became balanced, the chairman of the Yachting Club began his address. I don't remember his words precisely, but he was certainly very friendly. "Bloodless victory...", "the best of the best...", "a fine example for our young people", and other words to this effect.

I was really moved, you know.

But as soon as the chairman finished his address, Mister Baldwin rose to speak.

"Is the honourable Lord Chairman aware that the prize-winner Captain Wrungel has violated the traditions of our club by prancing on a horse while wearing his seaman's uniform?" he asked and produced a Norwegian newspaper showing me astride a horse.

Well, there is no denying that the photograph is not very fitting for a sailor, so I was not very much surprised to hear murmurings in the hall. Still and all, I had won the race, and the winners, as we know, are not judged. That was the gist of the chairman's reply. The noise died down, and I thought we were over the rocks, when this Baldwin took the floor again.

"And is the honourable Chairman aware," he continued, "that the said Captain Wrungel has intercepted a load of herrings bound for a British overseas territory, and that the method of transportation suggested by Mister Wrungel is injurious to the interests of ship-owners who are subjects of the British crown?"

That was quite a trump card, let me tell you. Traditions and uniforms are all very well, but they place their trading interests above such sentimental matters in England. The hall was now in an uproar. But Mister Baldwin was not yet done.

He raised his voice and continued:

“And is the Lord Chairman aware that the said herrings, which, as has been established, are injurious to the interests of British ship-owners, are at present, through the good offices of Mister Archibald Dandy, and with his direct connivance, being penned in the Admiralty dock of His Royal Majesty? Are you, finally, aware that the said Archibald Dandy has stooped to crime against God and King and so far forfeited the duty and honour of a Briton as to hire himself out to act as Moscow’s secret agent?”

That was like a bomb explosion. A regular pandemonium broke loose in the customs house. Some booed, others clapped, then all jumped from their seats, divided into two opposing sides and began to advance on one another with the most belligerent attitudes.

At this point Mister Dandy could contain himself no longer. He jumped down from the scales and threw himself at Baldwin. That was the signal for a general free-for-all.

We would probably have been trampled down in the *melée* that followed, but the prizes saved us. As soon as Mister Dandy jumped down, our scale was swung up to the very ceiling and we watched the fray from up there unassailed.

And let me tell you that it was quite a battle. The air was thick with grunts and snorts, the thudding of thick British skulls, the crunching of old English furniture.

The honourable gentlemen became carried away, pounding each other with whatever came to hand, and the floor became strewn with teeth, real and artificial ones, collars and cuffs.

Gradually the battle began to abate, most of the combatants heaped on the floor.

We came down over a heap of prostrate bodies and made

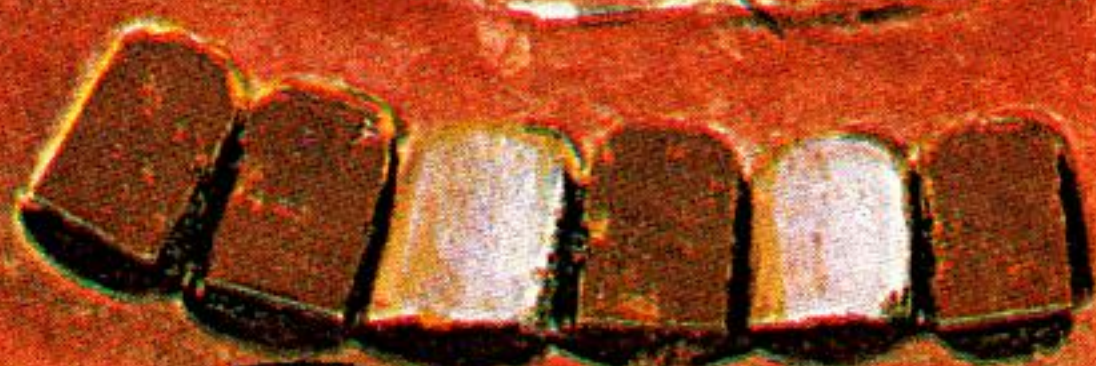


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for the exit. At that moment Mister Baldwin stirred and emitted a deep sigh.

“Are you aware...” he wheezed out crossly.

At this point the chairman came to as well, raised himself on an elbow and rang his bell.

“No, I am not aware of anything,” he said meekly and dropped back.

It became quite still. We picked our way out, heaved a sigh of relief and ran as fast as our legs would carry us to the *Rage*. Once there, we set sail and headed for Portsmouth to claim our herd of herrings.

Luckily the news about the affair at the customs house had not yet reached the docks. They let out our herrings without a murmur and even wished us *bon voyage*. Well, off we drove them, at a leisurely pace, and an hour later sighted the Isle of Wight. We skirted it, drove the herrings into a more compact herd and, leaning on the gunwale, watched the low shores of England melt in the distance.

I was still shaken by the recent events. Lom also looked depressed. Only Fooks seemed happy. He had managed to snatch a golden chain with a little anchor from among the prizes on the scales and was now looking for the hallmark.

But very soon he spat disgustedly and said, giving me the chain:

“In our line of business people get bashed by candlesticks for this kind of thing!”

I examined the chain and saw the reason for his displeasure. The end link of the chain bore a clear mark: “Artificial jewelry factory. Made in England.”

“Well, the craftsmanship is above reproach and the factory is a reputable one,” I said returning the chain.

At that moment the sail flapped behind my back and the next moment I was floundering in water.

I thrashed about blindly and caught hold of something solid. When my eyes cleared I discovered I was clutching at Lom's leg, and his head was in front of me. In his turn Lom was holding onto Fooks's leg, while Fooks was clutching at the golden chain whose little anchor had caught at the *Rage's* bulwark. Imagine the situation! The yacht was sailing along at full speed, and the entire crew was overboard. It was the result of our negligence – we had been so overcome by the events at the customs house that I forgot to lash the steering wheel. So the boom had swung and the crew had been swept overboard.

The little chain actually saved us. If not for it, the yacht would have gone ahead, herrings and all, leaving us in the sea.

Having assessed the situation, I commanded loudly: "Steady there!" then pulled myself closer to Lom, therefrom on to Fooks, and then, along the chain onto the *Rage*. Lom and Fooks followed suit.

Once back on deck, I examined the chain again. It was really amazing – not a link was bent. It *was* first-class craftsmanship!

"Take good care of it, Fooks," I said.

Then we had each a glass of rum to warm ourselves up, I appointed the watches and spent another ten minutes or so on deck with my pipe, watching the horizon and living over the events of the last few days.

"Goodbye, merry old England!" I said. We certainly had had a merry enough time there.

I finished my pipe and went down.

Early the next morning Lom came to wake me up for my watch and reported that we had entered the Atlantic Ocean.



CHAPTER SEVEN

about astronomical reckonings, stratagems and pharaohs

Nothing much happened on board in the Atlantic, except for a little matter of timepieces, not really worth recording. But I'll tell it out of regard for the overall veracity of my story.

You know of course that in the open sea, when no shores are visible, the ship's navigator determines her position and lays the ship's course with the help of celestial bodies and a chronometer. The celestial bodies are the Sun, the Moon, the planets and the stars. They have been provided by Nature itself, so to speak. The chronometer, now, is a different proposition, the fruit of the efforts of many generations of men. Obviously, its purpose is to measure time.

Measuring time is a tricky business. In the West, England for one, they are still arguing whether time actually exists. Some hold that it is an abstract category, a phantom, as it were. And if it does not exist, how can you measure it? Well, my opinion is that if people find time for such pointless arguments it means that it exists all right, and they have too

much of it. As for measuring it, it is indeed a difficult task, and it took people a lot of time to perfect their timepieces.

All kinds of clocks were used, beginning with sun dials. Then they invented the sand-glass, followed by wall clocks, alarm-clocks and pocket watches. They don't use alarm-clocks in navigation these days thinking them not exact enough. But in my opinion any clock is better than no clock.

My namesake Christopher Columbus did not have any clock at all and still managed to discover America. Wall clocks, I agree, are not suitable for a ship. People have to attach all kinds of weights to their chains to induce them to go—horse-shoes, bricks, flatirons, and such like. Imagine such a clock on board ship during a storm. It would be dangerous to come near it. As for alarm-clocks, well, they're not bad at all.

But still, it's not done, so while getting ready for my voyage I bought, among other useful things, an excellent chronometer.

Well, so I bought it and put it in my desk. I had no need for it as long as we were sailing in sight of shores. Now that we were in open ocean, I had to make a reckoning. So I went down to my cabin, got out the chronometer and discovered that the confounded thing had gone completely haywire. It was showing the oddest time imaginable. When the sun was rising it showed midday and when the sun was overhead it showed six in the evening. I tapped it and rapped it and shook it, but nothing helped.

Well, we were certainly in a quandary. We were sailing briskly along but did not know where. One can lose one's bearings completely in this manner.

Salvation arrived from quite an unexpected quarter.

While in England we took on a lot of provisions: canned goods, cereals and some live animals. Among the latter there was a box of chickens from Greenwich. We had eaten nearly all of them by then and only two roosters remained in the box – one white and the other black.

As I was standing on deck, sextant in my hand, wondering how I was going to establish our position, both my roosters cried in a duet: “Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

I made an observation that very second, and the rest was easy as pie. Both roosters were from Greenwich, and that meant it was sunrise in Greenwich then. I knew time exactly enough.

Still, I made a check-up. At night I went on deck with the sextant again and exactly at midnight both roosters sang out in a duet: “Cock-a-Doodle-doo!”

I could have rested content with these “timepieces” and used them to the end of the trip, but then I discovered a better method of determining time. It’s a truly wonderful method, and if I have time I may yet write a thesis on the subject and thus enrich science.

In short, my method consists of the following: you take a clock – any kind, from a tower clock to a children’s toy watch – anything will do as long as it has a face and two hands. It is not even necessary that the hands should move; in fact it is much preferable that they shouldn’t. Let them stay in one place. Let us say the hands show, like my chronometer, twelve o’clock. Excellent! Of course one cannot use such a chronometer during the greater part of the day, but that is a luxury after all. We don’t want to make reckonings a dozen times a day. Two is quite enough. And twice a day – at midday and at midnight, your chronometer shows exact time.

Just as long as you don't miss the right moment –but that depends on the observer's competence.

In this way I devised a method of using my chronometer. Just in time, too, for our provisions were running short, we were heartily sick of tinned meat and my crew were casting longing looks in the direction of the two roosters.

But we just could not make up our minds which of them to sacrifice first. They were so attached to each other that we had not the heart to deprive one of the other's company.

I pondered the problem for a while and decided to set up a commission of ways and means, consisting of Fooks and myself. We discussed the problem thoroughly, but did not find a solution. Then we coopted Lom on the commission and held another session. Lom, unexpectedly, proved invaluable, manifesting a clarity of mind and resourcefulness that at once presented the matter in its true perspective.

Without a moment's hesitation he said:

"Kill the black one."

"But the white one will pine," we said.

"Let him," Lom declared. "It's no concern of ours. We'll eat him too soon."

Well, I could not but agree. And the rooster, let me tell you, proved delicious –fat and tender. We picked the bones clean as clean. The same was true of the white one too, which we ate a few days later.

In this manner we rounded Bretagne and entered the Bay of Biscay.

And this bay, as you're probably aware, is famous for its storms.

I was quite apprehensive, aware of its reputation and having the herrings to look after. But that time I was lucky.

The sea was as smooth as a mirror. Further south, too, the weather was propitious, and it favoured us all the way to Gibraltar. There we got into trouble. As we sailed at a leisurely pace, driving the herrings along and admiring the view of tall mountains, they asked us, from the British fortress, as the custom is: "What ship?"

Well, I answered, all unsuspecting:

"The yacht *Rage*, captain Wrungel."

On we went, and suddenly, on the very threshold of the Mediterranean, there was a blast and a whistle and I looked up to see a huge hole in our sail. Cannon were firing, water sprouting higher than our mast, and from the right a fleet of warships was racing to intercept us. Well, the situation was clear enough – we were attacked by pirates of unknown nationality.

There is no call to smile, young man. You imagine pirates belong to old sea tales. Nothing of the kind. The breed is quite numerous today too. Only in times past pirates flew their Jolly Roger when attacking a ship, while today pirate flags stay buried deep on the bottom of trunks, but piratical ways are widely practised. Don't you read the papers, young man? One keeps hearing about pirates hijacking a plane, or taking hostages and demanding a ransom. Well, at the time I'm describing, they hadn't yet got to planes, but did plenty of mischief on high seas.

Well, I certainly was in no position to give battle. When attacked by superior forces, the sea tactics advises hasty retreat.

But I could not retreat either. There was hardly any wind, and there was a hole in the sail besides.

Well, there was just one thing left – to employ a stratagem.

“Light up, chaps!” I commanded to my crew and got out my tobacco pouch.

Actually, my crew were one hundred per cent non-smokers, but they dared not disobey an order in a combat situation, so they made up fat cigarettes and began to emit smoke.

I pulled on my pipe, too, and in three minutes time the smoke enveloped the boat completely and hid it from the enemy.

Smart work, wasn't it? And you haven't heard all either.

Very well, we were hidden. But the smoke-screen would soon be dispersed by the wind. So, after a moment's thought I gave another command:

“Lower the sails, clear the deck, take cover in the living quarters!”

Lom and Fooks battened down the hatches, took refuge in the cabin and hastily filled in the cracks, while I gathered all the heavy objects on board and hoisted the bundle onto the mast. The centre of gravity shifted upwards, the vessel lost its stability, listed to port and the next moment the *Rage* rolled over.

I was thrown into water, naturally, but I climbed out and lay flat on the stern awaiting developments. Soon the smoke-screen drifted away and the pirate fleet opened to view a mere hundred fathoms away. The decisive moment had come. Well, I thought, this is it. I placed my pipe upright over the keel and watched. Suddenly I saw them semaphoring on the flagship:

“Enemy ship sunk by our accurate fire. Order to retreat as new-type submarines sighted in the area. Admiral Don Canallie.”

As soon as they made out the signal, the pirate ships

scurried off like chickens from a hawk. And no wonder – even in this reversed position, the *Rage* looked impressive enough.

Well, I waved them goodbye, dived, unhooked the load from the mast, the yacht made another turnover and resumed its normal position. Lom and Fooks crawled out on deck and asked: “How are things?”

“Well,” I said, “see for yourselves.”

But in fact there was nothing to be seen – just some wisps of smoke on the horizon. I gave them a last glance through the telescope and went down to change. Well, we patched the sails, cleaned the ship and then attended to our herrings. And just in time too. With all that shooting and general tumult, some herrings straggled away from the herd, disappearing God knows where. On the other hand, all kinds of stray fishes of various breeds, mackerel, sardines, bullheads and what not, took advantage of our enforced loss of vigilance to insinuate themselves into the herd. I was quite at a loss for a moment. Imagine accepting a load of pure-bred Dutch herrings and delivering a hodge-podge of the lowest quality. It would be a disgrace. I set about working with my whip. Some two hours later order was restored. My arms ached with all the whip-swinging, to be sure, but the outsiders had been driven out, the herd was pure of any admixtures and we laid a course for Alexandria, our port of destination.

No more mishaps befell us on the way and two days later we sighted Alexandria. We dropped anchor at the roads, summoned the sales agent and ourselves lolled on deck looking at the city and exchanging impressions.

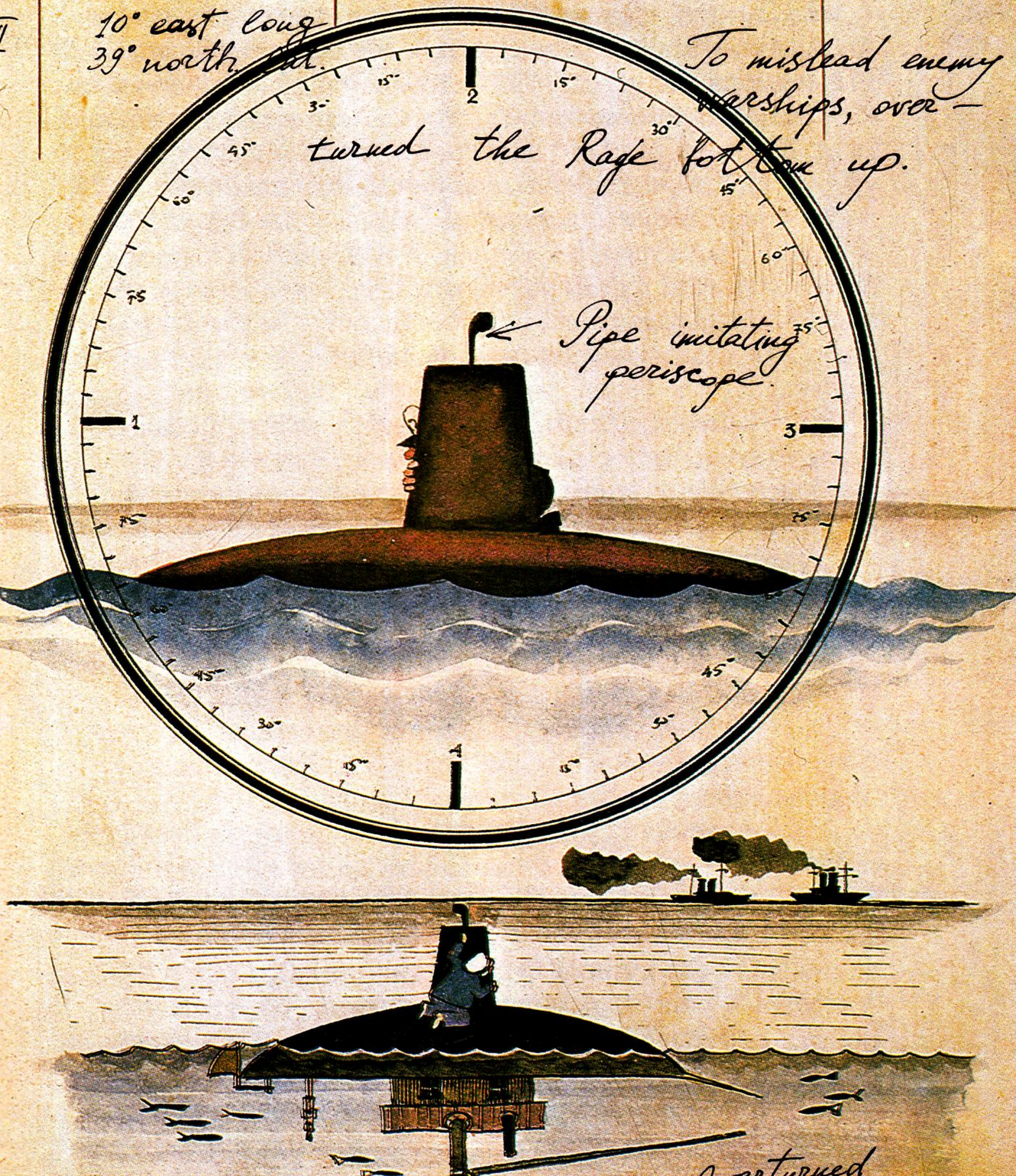
Not that there were many impressions to exchange at that time.

10° east long
39° north lat.

To mislead enemy
warships, over-
turned the Rage bottom up.

turned the Rage bottom up.

Pipe imitating
periscope



returned

Ancient Egypt, of course, was quite a country too, and Alexandria was world famous. But at the time of our visit with herrings, the port of Alexandria presented little interest to an inquisitive traveller. Of course, you heard plenty of talk about Egypt, the land of pharaohs, but the port presented a very uninspiring sight. Bales of cotton everywhere, water at the embankment forty fathoms deep. They flew the Egyptian flag, to be sure, but everything else was British – British laws, British ships, and British policemen. The only difference was that the poverty was more obvious. Peasants, fishermen and even clerks went about barefoot, to say nothing of beggars.

At last the agent came on board. He checked the bill of lading, showed us a place in the docks and began taking on the freight. We delivered the herrings by the head, and the totting up was like a bolt from the blue – nearly half the herd was missing.

Whether the herrings got lost accidentally or defected with ill intent I cannot say, but one could not argue against facts, and the agent was already drawing up a statement to this effect.

Of course I could plead all kinds of unforeseen circumstances, but it would hold no water. I was terribly upset, and then it suddenly dawned on me.

“Just a moment,” I said to the agent, “whoever has heard of herrings counted by the head? They’re not cattle, you know! Weigh them up first, and then make your complaints!”

The agent, seeing I was not one of those simpletons to be twisted round his little finger, placed the cargo on scales. And what do you think? There was a considerable gain in weight! You may find this surprising, but in fact it was only

to be expected. Just think: a pleasant journey, plenty of good wholesome food, a change of climate, sea bathing... These are all factors that are beneficial to health. So our herrings, too, used them to advantage, built up their muscles and accumulated some extra fat.

My experiment had proved a resounding success. The business completed, I decided to take an airing on shore and go sightseeing.

We went into the desert, for most of Egypt is desert. There is a trolleybus line that takes you into the desert, but riding in a trolleybus was too dull and we decided to try the local means of conveyance. I climbed a two-humped camel, Lom ensconced himself on a one-humped one, and Fooks mounted a donkey. We made quite a picturesque group too.

And so our caravan arrived in Cairo. Cairo was a very different kettle of fish. It really was Egypt, and every inch of ground smacked of antiquity. The Sakhara desert is next door, and there are the Bedouins, and the date palms and, most important, the pyramids, sphinxes and other monuments of hoary antiquity. We decided to see the pyramids first. We bought our tickets, hobbled our mounts and went inside.

Well, there were all those subterranean corridors, spotlessly clean and undefiled for all that five thousand years had passed. There was electricity, bootblacks at every turning, ice-cream booths at every crossing – in a word, those pharaohs had done themselves proud.

Well, we peered at some hieroglyphs, gazed at a gold sarcophagus and at the mummy inside it, and turned back. When we were out in the open again we saw that Fooks was missing. We waited a while and were on the point of

instituting a search, when he came up running, holding onto his cheek. I looked, and what do you think, he had his jaw swollen and blue.

“Who did that to you, Fooks?” I asked.

“I just chipped off a bit of the sarcophagus as a keepsake, and that pharaoh went and clouted me on the jaw,” Fooks complained.

“Have you gone out of your mind, Fooks?” I exclaimed. “The pharaoh has been dead these five thousand years!”

“He’s no deader than I, and there’s a whole platoon of them too.”

“Platoon of Egyptian pharaohs?”

“Why Egyptian? British. There they march!”

At that moment I saw a platoon of policemen and remembered that the police are known as pharaohs in the underworld. They looked quite fearsome too, wearing their helmets, and with truncheons on their belts...



CHAPTER EIGHT

*in which Fooks gets his deserts, then counts crocodiles
and ends by demonstrating outstanding agricultural talent*

Back on the *Rage* I gave Fooks good dressing down.

“Let me hear no more of these ‘keepsakes’ of yours! Is that clear?”

Well, Fooks was contrite and promised to behave. The bruise eventually healed and we went sailing up the Nile.

At last there could be no doubt that we were in Africa. All about us were lotuses and papyruses, with herds of antelopes grazing along the shores and lions dozing languorously here and there. Hyppopotamuses were snorting in the water and tortoises warming themselves in the sun. It was better than a zoo.

Lom and Fooks were as delighted as little children, teasing crocodiles with sticks and laughing their heads off, whereas I had my hands full steering and looking for a likely village to stop at for the night.

As you must surely realise, young man, I had not undertaken that journey along the Nile merely out of idle curiosity. The initial plan of my cruise was to cross the Atlantic and emerge into the Pacific by way of the Panama Canal.

The herrings had made it necessary to change my plans. Now we were facing a tough passage across the Indian Ocean. Out in the ocean, you know, there are no shops or stalls available. Once you run out of provisions, you stay without. Well, being a provident and frugal person, I decided to stock up for the cruise in Egypt.

At last I caught sight of a village which looked clean and inviting. I moored the yacht at the bank and all three of us made for the market.

The populace was very friendly and the prices quite reasonable. We bought a lot of excellent foodstuffs: a couple of pickled elephant trunks, a box of ostrich eggs, lots of dates, sago, cinnamon, cloves and other spices. We loaded our purchases, I raised the flag and was just about to shove off when Lom reported that Fooks was missing again. How d'you like that?

I was on the point of going without Fooks, but couldn't bring myself to abandon him like that. Of course he had those thieving habits of his, but he tried hard and had a heart of gold. Left on his own in Egypt, where the people are trusting and there was nobody to hold him in check, with temptations at every step, he was sure to go wrong and end up in prison. I decided to try and rescue him. We went back to the village and at its edge saw a crowd and heard laughter and screams. Lom and I raced up and what did we see? Fooks had landed himself in a proper fix. He was crouching on the ground, his head all but buried in the sand, covering himself with his hat, and a huge ostrich was jabbing at his hind quarters with his beak, and kicking him like a football. The audience was encouraging the bird with shouts and laughter and clapping like in a circus.

I yelled at the ostrich, and he sat down in fright and also hid his head in the sand. Now there were two of them.

I grabbed Fooks by his collar, gave him a good shake, set him on his feet and questioned him sternly. It appeared that he had again yielded to temptation, despite the promise he had given me. He saw an ostrich strolling at large, crept up to him and pulled a feather out of his tail—again as a “keepsake”. Well, the ostrich, for all that it is by nature a peaceable bird, could not leave such an outrage unpunished.

Fooks showed me the feather too. I wondered whether I should give it back to the ostrich, but decided against it. In the first place, the ostrich had no need of it and would grow a new one, in the second, it had already got even with Fooks, having pulled out a biggish patch from his pants.

We said goodbye to the hilarious crowd, returned to the yacht, set sail and made our way back, down the Nile. We reached the sea without any misadventure and sailed east along the shore. We were heading for the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

We entered the canal early in the morning. Generally pilots are invited to guide ships along the canal, but I had been there before, know every little stone in the bottom and so decided to dispense with the pilot. On we sailed, Fooks on the lookout, I steering and Lom cooking breakfast in the galley. Lom was an excellent cook by the way, and would produce dishes to tempt the dead. That day too... Early in the morning Lom put on an apron, rolled up his sleeves and lighted the stove. I glanced in as I passed, and recoiled: it was hot enough outside, and in the galley it was

like a smithy with bellows working. Flames were leaping, pans bubbling, a chicken getting beautifully browned—and the aroma was simply out of this world. Lom was a past master at sauces and gravies, you know. The delicious smell attracted all living creatures from along the Suez Canal, who lined the banks and stood licking their chops. So we had an excellent chance to study the local fauna. And let me tell you, it is really something. On the left stood tigers and boars from Arabia, while on the African bank there were lions, elephants and rhinoceros. A giraffe turned up, sniffed, and obviously decided our yacht was a floating restaurant. So he followed us along the bank, craning his neck towards us and dripping hungry saliva.

Just about then Lom got through with his cooking and laid the table for three on the afterdeck, all in the best style, with a clean cloth, plates, forks, knives, and such like. And can you imagine it?—when he emerged from the galley with a tureen in his hands, if that long-necked ruminant didn't go and poke his muzzle into the tureen. Lom yelled at him something terrible, but the animal was immune to persuasion. He smacked his lips and all but knocked the tureen out of Lom's hands. How d'you like that? The canal was so narrow there was no getting away from him—you can't sail over dry land, you know. A good cuff on the long neck might have been effective; but I could not let go of the wheel—it's quite tricky, you know, navigating a boat along the canal, while Fooks was so absorbed in the fauna show he saw or heard nothing but the lions and the tigers. And Lom's hands were occupied with the tureen. There was nothing for it but for him to beat a hasty retreat.

“Back away, Lom!” I shouted.

"Aye, aye, sir," he said and began to back down the companion way.

But a giraffe has plenty of neck. His muzzle just followed Lom down into the cabin. Lom pressed himself to the wall in the far corner, but the giraffe could still reach him there.

"Driven into a corner," he reported to me from the cabin.

That won't do, I decided, we need our breakfast ourselves. So I risked leaving the helm for a second to slam the giraffe's neck with the door. And it worked, you know, much better than any vociferations. The giraffe stood firm, jerked his neck out and drew himself up. He was obviously offended and, in his frustration, snapped up and chewed the weather-cock.

I did not particularly mind that—I had a spare weather-cock, several of them in fact, and I prized the breakfast much more. And the giraffe saved his face, so to speak. To be sure, he had been thrown out on his ear, figuratively speaking, but at least he had got himself a snack. After all a weather-cock is quite a delicacy in that desert of theirs where there is little besides rocks to chew.

Well, we ate our breakfast with relish and sailed on.

Towards evening we passed Suez, and got caught in a dead calm for two days. We used the enforced idleness to have some rest, mend the sails, bowse the rigging down, and generally clean up. Then a fresh breeze started, we set sail and went out into the Red Sea. At first we sailed free, but towards evening the wind began to mount and we got quite a thrashing. A simoom came swirling from the Sakhara Desert. It became unbearably hot, there seemed to be no air to breathe and a great swell arose. It got the better of Fooks,

who held out for a while and then collapsed all of a sudden. He did not even manage to crawl to his bunk, but stretched out on deck, on the crate with provisions, groaning and fanning himself with the ostrich feather. He was a sorry sight, but we could do nothing to help him. Seasickness is not deadly, but it does not yield to treatment.

Otherwise things looked quite lively. The simoom actually played into our hands, driving the *Rage* along at a brisk pace. I watched the sea for a while, checked up the course, left Lom to steer and went to the cabin for a snooze. One of my build is better off on a night watch in a weather like this. Lom, now, was a hardy chap, he would be all right in the daytime too.

At night it became cooler, Lom went to sleep and I took up my post at the wheel.

Nights in those latitudes are amazingly beautiful. There was the moon swaying in the heavens like a lantern on a chain; there was the sea emitting a blue mysterious light, and after an hour of this fairy-tale business, all kinds of devilry start creeping into your head, things like the magic carpet, dragons, spirits and such like. So there I stood, lost to the world, and suddenly I heard Fooks muttering some kind of nonsense. I listened. Well, it was no seasickness, it was downright raving. A touch of tropical fever, no less. I could hear him whispering:

“A crocodile, sir, and another crocodile, and a third...”

I lashed the wheel, went down to the cabin, took a doze of quinine and went up again. Fooks meantime continued with his crocodile counting:

“Twenty-seven crocodiles, twenty-eight crocodiles, thirty crocodiles...”

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“Enough, Fooks, stop counting crocodiles. Better take this,” I said.

With these words I made a step forward, and stumbled against some living thing, fell and dropped the powder. Then somebody snapped at my finger. Well that made me cry out. Lom heard me and rushed out on deck. But as soon as he took a few steps across the deck, he yelled wildly too.

Fooks meantime went on counting:

“Forty-five crocodiles ... fifty crocodiles...”

It made your flesh creep. But I took myself in hand, struck a match and in its light saw that the deck was literally crawling with crocodiles. New-born baby crocodiles, little creatures which were really quite harmless, but crocodiles nonetheless, not the most amiable of creatures. Well, I made short shrift of the lot of them, picking up the mop and sweeping them into the home element without any more ado.

When I had cleared the deck of the reptiles somewhat, I started looking for the source of the invasion. They were crawling out of a chink in the crate which was supposed to hold ostrich eggs. A mistake must have been made in the village, or else they had decided to play a joke on us and sold us crocodile eggs instead. What with the heat and Fooks lying on top of them, the baby crocodiles had hatched in a hurry.

Once the cause of the incident was established, it was easy to neutralise its effects. I did not even bother to unpack the crate – just laid a board leading from the chink to the gunwale, and along it the reptiles crawled one after another and flopped overboard all the way to Aden. We only opened the crate when the stream had ended and found nothing but egg-shells left. That’s the kind of rum thing that can happen to you in the tropics.

Having dealt with the crocodiles and restored order on board, I thought I could relax now. But no, fate had new trials in store for me.

We were sailing along the Eritrean coast. Lom was sleeping in the cabin, and Fooks was recuperating on the deck. The swell had subsided, and all was peaceful. Suddenly, at the break of dawn, I heard a blood-curdling yell out in the sea:

“Help!”

“Man overboard!” I shouted. “All hands on deck! Hard over helm! Ready about!”

The crew was at action stations within seconds. Life-belts, buoys and rope ends were tossed into the water, and several minutes later a very wet man was fished out of the sea and taken on board.

He wore the stripes of an Italian N.C.O. and looked pretty bedraggled. Still, he shook himself like a dog, cleared his throat and saluted:

“Sergeant Julio Banditto at your service, sir.”

At my service indeed!

“Thank your lucky stars, Sergeant,” I told him, “and tell me what has happened to you and what I am supposed to do with you.”

“I was swept off the beach by the simoom while under the influence. I beg you, Captain, to put me ashore anywhere on Italian territory.”

“My dear man,” I retorted, “aren’t you asking too much?

Do you know how far your Italy is from here?”

“Italy is everywhere,” the sergeant interrupted me.

“Here—” pointing right, “and here—” pointing left. “All the world is Italy.”

What was the sense of arguing with one so clearly under the influence of alcohol still? All the more so that in those years thugs like him had taken the upper hand in Italy and were really planning to lay their hands on the entire world or at least a large chunk of it. They had put some of their plans into execution too: the Italian boot ruled supreme in Abyssinia, Somalia and Eritrea. These ruffians never dreamed that before very long, for aiming so high with those boots of his, their chief would be strung up boots upwards.

Still, in those years he was still strutting about head upwards, trampling other peoples' soil underfoot.

But I refrained from arguing with our unmasked guest, resolving to get rid of him as soon as possible.

"Very well," I said, "Where exactly would you prefer to be beached?"

"What about those rocks over there?" he said.

Without suspecting a thing, I made for the rocky bit of coast, drew up and had the gangway ready for him to go ashore. At this point my sergeant saluted me again and said:

"Thank you kindly, Captain. Now will you please accompany me ashore?"

"Never mind the thanks, my man," I replied. "I have no time to waste. Just be off with you."

"Is that so?" he asked, produced a whistle and blew into it hard. The next moment a band of cutthroats descended on us from behind the rocks, and before I could collect my wits, my crew, captain included, were handcuffed and marched off.

Well, they led us over a desert terrain, with nothing but rocks and arid soil around. Soon we reached a military camp.

They left us outside and went in to report to their commander. Soon a colonel appeared with a plateful of macaroni in his hands.

“Aha,” he said eating the macaroni all the while. “Invading Italian territory, aren’t you? Confiscate the boat, set the prisoners to field work, apprise Rome of the incident. Let them decide their fate.”

So we were driven to do field work. A day’s toil in the scorching sun sapped all our strength. It did not occur to anybody to give us a meal. The only thing we had to eat was a handful of oats Fooks managed to steal from a mule’s mouthbag.

In the evening Sergeant Julio came, bringing a plateful of macaroni from his own ration by way of thanks for having saved his life.

A handout, to be sure, but beggars can’t be choosers. I divided the macaroni into three equal shares and started on mine. Lom, who never suffered from lack of appetite, wolfed his portion in a second. But Fooks gave his macaroni a sniff and made a face.

“Is this macaroni?” he said. “It’s a sorry ersatz, that’s what it is. Really, I am surprised at you. Living in such beneficent climate and eating macaroni that don’t deserve the name, made of maize of all things. Why, you could set up a macaroni plantation that would yield enough for all of Italy. Go tell your colonel that I am prepared to sow an experimental lot for you. I have some seedlings on board the yacht.”

I felt my eyes popping out – fancy spinning so outrageous a yarn! But that stupid oaf Julio was quite taken in and really ran off in search of his colonel. And imagine – they made Fooks our elder, allotted him a plot, brought a sack of

macaroni from the *Rage* and planted sentries all round. The colonel came to admonish us personally.

“There is your experimental plot,” he said, “but mind you don’t attempt any hocus-pocus with me. I’ll have you skinned alive if you get up to any tricks.”

I could see he would be as good as his word and tried to talk Fooks out of his madcap venture:

“Back out before it’s too late,” I whispered to him. “You’ll get us all into trouble.”

But Fooks just jerked a shoulder.

“Don’t you worry, Captain, it will be okay. Mum’s the word!”

Well, then we dug up the beds, Fooks broke the macaroni into little pieces, planted them and we watered them every day for the sentries to see. And what do you think?! In three days they sprouted! Little green shoots appeared and burgeoned.

Fooks walked by the beds, as pleased as Punch, loosening the soil and telling the Italians:

“This is not some cheap fake, it’s natural product. Just you wait: soon they’ll be a man’s height, then you mow them down, throw the leaves to the cattle and the stems you break up and chuck into the pan. Now *that* is what I call macaroni!”

The Italians believed him. More than that, *I* believed him. How could you have any doubts when the shoots are there for all to see. The colonel asked Fooks, “Can we have a whole field planted?”

“Why not, of course you can,” Fooks replied. “There aren’t enough seedlings though. And if we sow your kind, they have to be watered with alcohol, or they would not sprout.”



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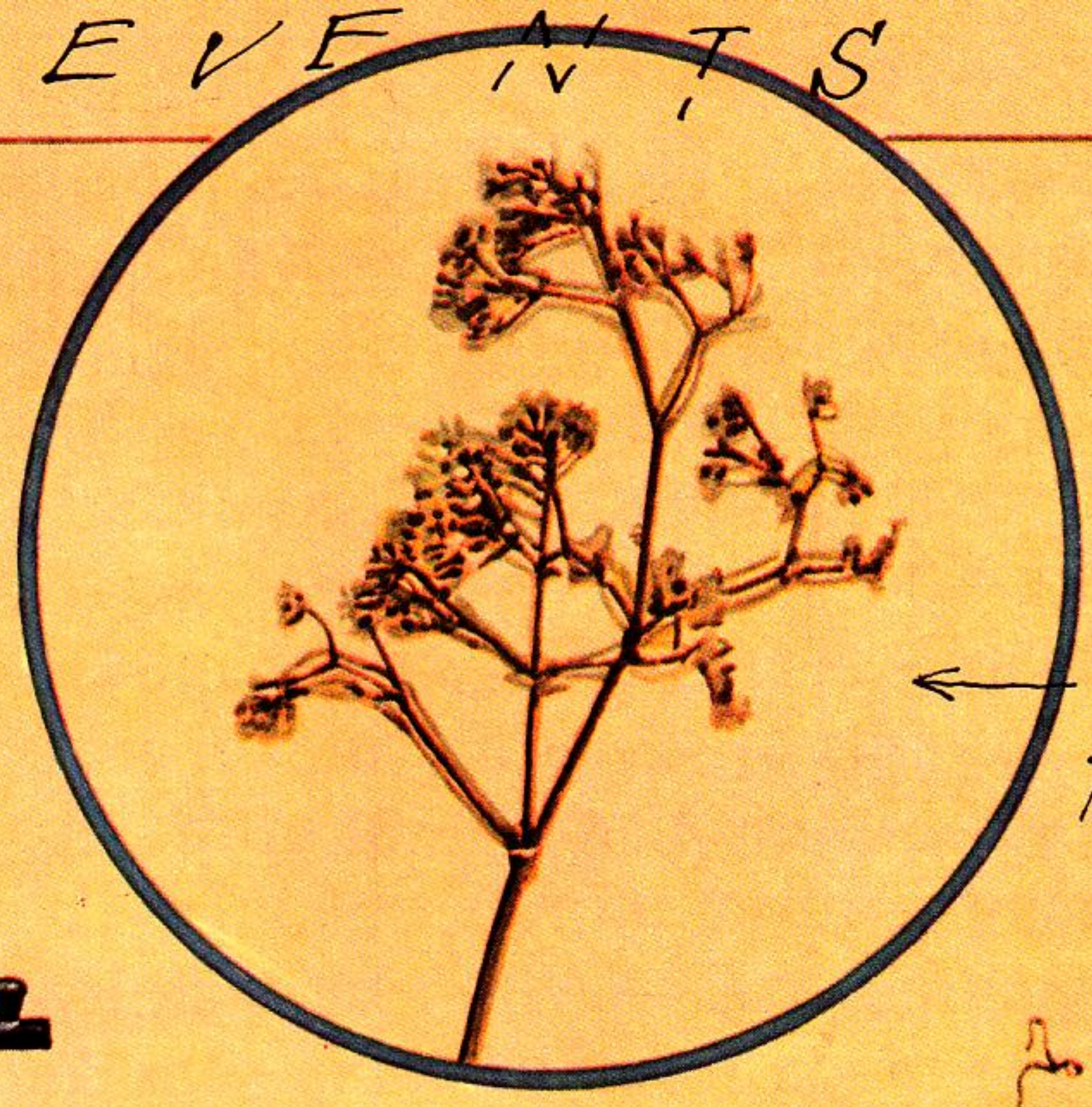
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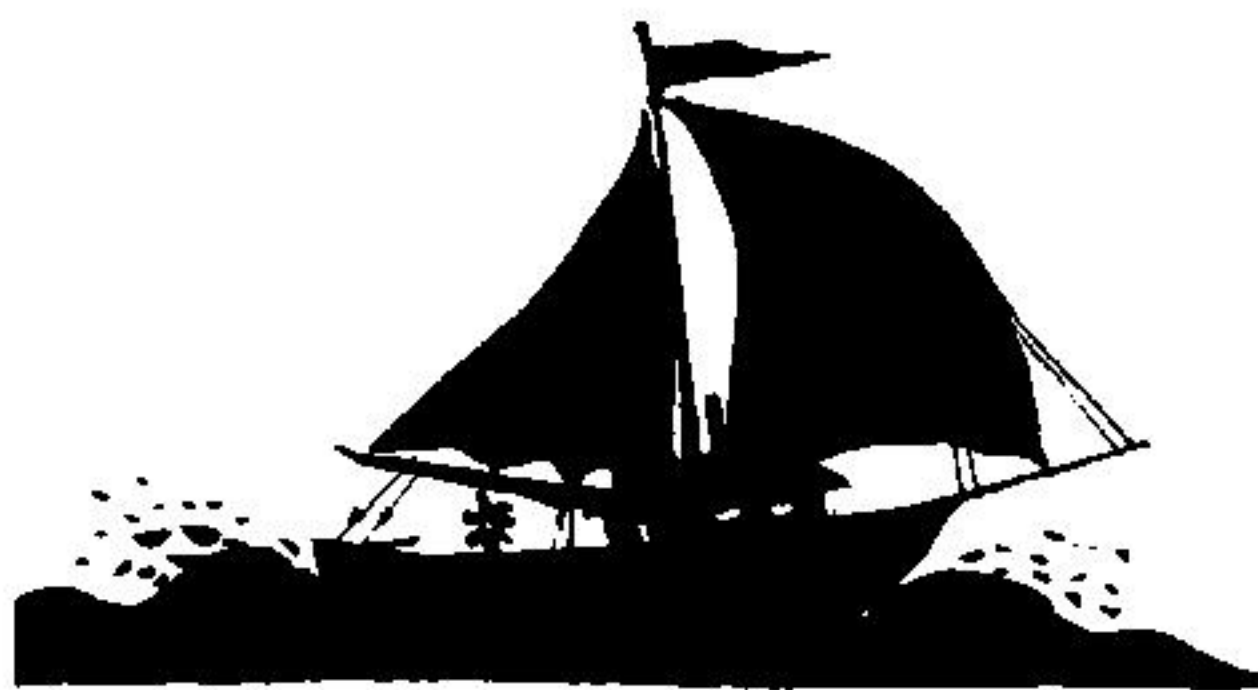
“Very well, I’ll tell my chaps, they have enough alcohol and to spare.”

The next day they brought all the macaroni they had, beat them with flails to break them up, sowed them, and set about watering them from a big tank of alcohol. But the soldiers who did the watering were sorry to see the alcohol go down the drain, so to speak, and took large swigs all the time. Towards evening the colonel arrived to supervise the operation, tossed off a glassful of the watering fluid himself, and the camp went on a proper bender. There were songs first, then quarrels began to flare up, fighting broke out. And when the moon rose, the camp subsided into a drunken stupor, the air reverberating with mighty snores. That was what we had been waiting for. We made our way to the seashore, boarded our *Rage*, set sail and flew the coop.

“You ought to have been an agronomist, Fooks,” I said. “How did you make those macaroni sprout? It’s nothing short of a miracle.”

“Sleight of hand, Captain,” he replied. “I had some oats left in my pocket. And with oats added even cigarette-stubs will sprout.”

So that was the explanation. Anyway, we got away safely. The next day we rounded the cape of Guardafui and headed south.



CHAPTER NINE

About old customs and icebergs

The ocean greeted us with a steady trade-wind and the *Rage* ran along nicely. The humid wind relieved the heat somewhat, but there were plenty of indications that we were in the tropics. The sky was azure blue, the sun stood right overhead and, the main thing, there were lots of flying fish. They are wonderfully beautiful, those fish! Soaring above water like dragon-flies and gladdening the heart of an old sea-dog. Flying fish, you know, are the symbol of ocean spaces.

Those fish, worse luck, brought to my mind recollections of my young days, my first voyage, the crossing of the equator.

The equator, as you know, is an imaginary line, but its crossing has since days immemorial been celebrated by an amateur show on board ship. The Neptune is supposed to come on board, have a chat with the captain and give a dousing to all those who are crossing the equator for the first time in their life. I decided to revive this old custom. The props are easy to come by, so is the costume, but in my case the trickiest

problem was the casting. I was the only seasoned sailor on board, and I was also the captain, so willy-nilly I had to combine the two parts – those of captain and Neptune.

But I found a way out. I had a tub of water set up on deck in the morning, then pleaded sick and turned the command over to Lom. Lom presented his condolences, but was quite pleased to assume command and at once started ordering Fooks about.

Meantime I locked myself up in the cabin and set about preparing for the masquerade. I made myself a beard out of a mop, fashioned a trident and a crown, and hooked on a kind of fish tail behind. I looked swell in this rig, though I say it myself. Out of the mirror a very life-like Neptune looked at me.

When, according to my calculations, the *Rage* crossed the equator, I went up on deck in my Neptune guise.

The result was shattering. The crew was taken by surprise and, not being versed in old maritime customs, their reaction was quite unexpected.

When I emerged on the deck, my first mate Lom was proudly standing at the wheel peering at the horizon, while Fooks, according to his orders, was polishing the brass parts. Flying fish were still flitting above the waves.

All was serene, and my arrival passed unnoticed.

To attract attention I banged the trident on the deck and growled. Both Lom and Fooks turned round and froze in amazement. Recovering himself somewhat, Lom stepped forward and asked in an embarrassed voice:

“Is anything wrong, Captain?”

I was prepared for this question and came forth with a poem of my own composition.

*"I am Neptune, king of oceans,
Ruling over seas, winds and fish!
Give account about your purpose,
Where is sailing your fine ship?"*

Lom's face registered consternation, which gave way to desperate resolution. He jumped on me like a leopard, pinned my arms to my sides and dragged me towards the tub.

"Hold the captain's legs," he commanded to Fooks over his shoulder.

Fooks grabbed my legs and then Lom added in a less panicky voice:

"The old man has had a sun-stroke. He needs a dip in water to cool his head."

In vain did I struggle and argue that the old custom demanded that they, and not me, should be dipped in water to mark their first crossing of the equator. They just would not listen, but dragged me towards the tub and started dipping me there head first.

My crown became all sodden, the trident dropped out of my hand. My position was undignified and perilous, but I finally hit upon an idea and, mustering my last strength, took advantage of an interval between two immersions to command in a resolute voice:

"Enough dipping the captain!"

And it worked, you know. Lom yelled, "Aye, aye, sir!" and stood at attention, letting go of me.

I fell plop into the tub, with just my legs sticking out. I might well have drowned had not Fooks the presence of mind to tip the tub over. The water poured out but I got stuck. There I was, like a hermit-crab in his shell, trying to regain my breath. When I did, I crawled out of the tub crabwise, back stern.

You can imagine how my prestige suffered from this incident. On top of it all we lost the trade-wind. Dead calm was all around and the crew languished from idleness. Every morning Lom and Fooks would squat Turkish fashion on the deck and play cards until they were blue in the face.

I watched these goings-on for a couple of days and then decided to put a stop to it. Generally, I am against all gambling, and here this new craze served to undermine discipline. Judge for yourself—Fooks was a cardsharp, so Lom lost every single game.

What respect would Fooks have for his senior?

On the other hand, by simply forbidding cardplay I would leave them with nothing at all to do. They would die of sheer boredom, and that was worse than loose discipline.

So I suggested they play chess. It's a clever game that sharpens the wits and develops strategic thinking. Besides, it is conducive to quiet, home-like atmosphere.

So we brought out a table on deck, placed a samovar on it, stretched an awning above and sat there from morning till night, sipping tea, and engaged in bloodless combat.

One morning Lom and I were absorbed in a game, and Fooks decided to take a swim.

Lom's king had been driven into a corner, and I was anticipating checkmating it in two moves. Suddenly we were startled by a yell overboard. I looked up and saw Fooks's hat in the water (he was bathing in his hat as a safeguard against a sunstroke). Raising a cloud of spray with his flailing arms, Fooks was making for the yacht at top speed. Behind him a shark's fin could be seen slicing noiselessly the calm surface of the ocean.

Within seconds the shark overtook our wretched comrade,



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turned on its back and opened its fearsome jaws. I saw that unless I did something at once the poor chap was done for. Without looking I grabbed something from the table and threw it at the shark's muzzle.

The result was spectacular. The shark's teeth closed on the object, and the next moment the monster abandoned its pursuit of Fooks and began spinning around, its eyes popping and its jaws locked.

Fooks, meanwhile, reached the boat safely, scrambled aboard and sank on a chair in exhaustion. He croaked something unintelligible, his throat dry from the fear, and I hastily poured him out a glass of tea.

"Would you like a slice of lemon?" I asked and stretched my hand to the saucer with lemon. But it was empty.

It then dawned on me that at the moment of deadly danger it had been a lemon I grabbed and hurled at the shark, and it had saved Fooks's life. Sharks are obviously unused to its sour taste. And not sharks alone either—just try biting a whole lemon, young man, and your jaws will be locked too.

That incident made us stop sea-bathing. Of course we had many more lemons on board, but you cannot hope to hit the bull's eye every time. So we set up a shower on deck and doused each other from buckets as well. But all the same the heat was driving us crazy. Then, one fine morning, a breeze rose.

Wearied with indolence, the crew literally flew to their posts. Within seconds we set sail and the *Rage* continued on its way south.

You may find it surprising that I chose a course to the south. But have a look at the globe. Circumnavigating the earth at the equator is a long and tedious job that requires

many months. And near the pole you can walk round the earth's axis five times a day if you feel like it, all the more so since a day at the pole may last all of six months.

So we set our sights on the South Pole. We passed the temperate latitudes and were approaching the Antarctic Circle. It had grown coldish, and the sea was very different to look at: the water was grey, there was heavy fog and the clouds hovered low. One had to put on a fur coat while on watch, the ears went numb and icicles hung from the rigging.

But we never considered retreat. On the contrary, we availed ourselves of the favourable wind to reach ever lower latitudes. The light swell gave us no trouble, the crew was in excellent form, and I was eagerly awaiting the moment when we should sight the ice barrier of the Antarctic coast.

And finally one day Fooks, who had the eyes of an eagle, shouted, "Land ahead!"

I peered hard but could see nothing. I even wondered if Fooks was seeing things, but what do you know?! Before half an hour passed I saw a dark line on the horizon. It did look like land. Lom thought so too.

"Good lad, Fooks," I said and picked up my telescope. A glance through it told me Fooks had been mistaken. It was not land but a huge iceberg, the shape of a table.

I steered for it and two hours later it rose before us, sparkling with miriads of lights in the rays of the never setting sun.

Blue ledges rose above the sea like the walls of a chrystal castle. The ice mountain breathed calm and cold. Green waves dashed against it with a rumble and feathery clouds all but caught at its top.

I am something of an artist in my heart, and majestic nature

always moves me deeply. My arms crossed on my chest, I stood on deck lost in admiration.

Suddenly a scrawny walrus popped his silly mug out of the water, climbed up the icy slope, sprawled on a ledge and began scratching his tummy.

“Shoo!” I shouted at him. He paid no attention whatever, but went on scratching and snorting, defiling the majestic picture.

Unable to stand his insolence, I made a ghastly mistake, which nearly spelled an inglorious end to our entire cruise.

“Get me the gun,” I said to Fooks.

Fooks dived into the cabin and brought me the gun. I aimed at the cheeky walrus and bang!!!

Suddenly the mountain which has looked as mighty and strong as Mt. Everest, swayed and, with a deafening roar, broke into two. The sea boiled underneath us, bits of ice showered our deck, the iceberg made a somersault and turned upside down, carrying the *Rage* along, and—lo and behold!—we were perched on its top. When the elements had somewhat subsided, I took a look around. The yacht was firmly embedded among crags of ice, the grey ocean was all around us, and, to crown it all, at the foot of the ice mountain was the same cheeky walrus floating on its back and grinning up at us with exasperating gall.

The crew were subdued, overcome by the turn of events. They looked at me wonderingly, awaiting an explanation of the amazing phenomenon. Well, I had quite a stock of information on icebergs and I readily shared it with them.

I explained that an iceberg was a very treacherous neighbour for a ship, especially in summer, when its underwater part thaws away and any shock is liable to cause a shift in its centre

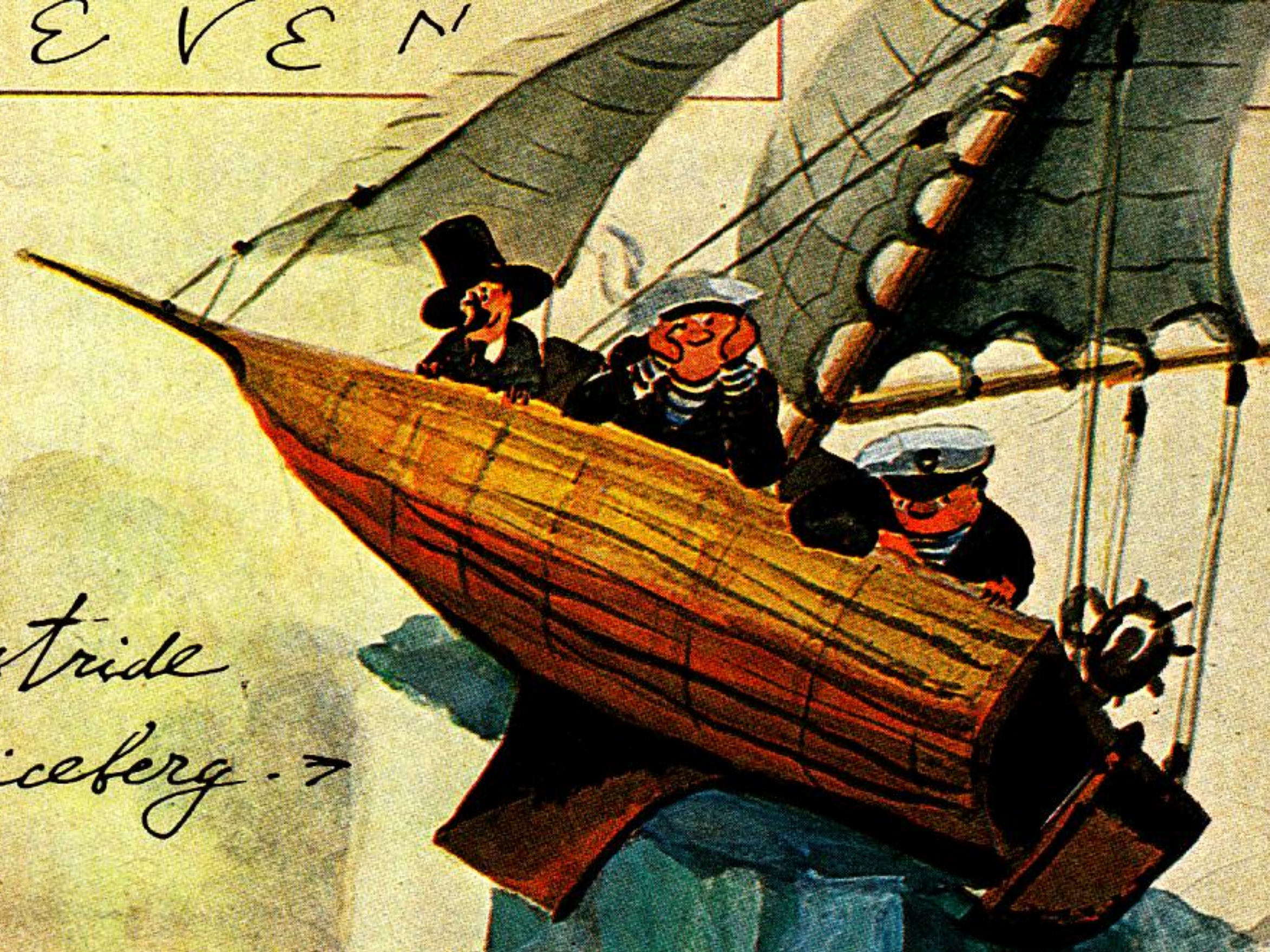
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Sailing astride
an iceberg.



The cheeky walrus.



of gravity. A cough may be enough, let alone a gunshot, to cause the mammoth thing to break up. And it is liable to overturn at the slightest provocation...

My crew heard me out attentively. Fooks, who was a sensitive chap, made no comment, but Lom, a blunt fellow that he was, asked me a very awkward question:

"It's all very well about its overturning, Captain, that's past history. But how does one turn it back as it was?"

Well, that, of course, was the rub. How does one go about turning the huge thing back? Surely we could not stay perched on it till doomsday!

I started pondering the question, while Lom decided to see what he could do on his own. Unthinkingly, he picked up an axe and chopped a chunk of some two hundred tons off the iceberg.

He must have imagined that in this way he was going to break up our icy postament and bring the yacht back to water level. The intention was good, but the result was quite the opposite.

It all came of lack of knowledge. Freed of part of its weight, the ice mountain became lighter and acquired additional buoyancy. So it rose higher. By the time I arrived at a decision, the top of the iceberg, yacht and all, was, through Lom's efforts, an additional forty feet higher over the sea level.

This made Lom repent his hasty action, and henceforth he fulfilled my commands with alacrity and precision.

My plan was simple enough. We sheeted the sails home and headed north, iceberg and all, closer to the tropical latitudes. The cheeky walrus decided to keep us company.

Before a week was out our ice mountain began to shrink,

then cracked, somersaulted once again and the *Rage* slid into the water as though down a slipway. And the walrus, the varmint, found himself on the top, but slipped and flopped down on our deck. Gloatingly, I grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, gave him a hearty belting and tossed him overboard. Serves him right. He'll know better than annoying seamen next time.

Lom, meanwhile, swung the yacht about, and the *Rage* headed south again.



CHAPTER TEN

*in which the reader makes the acquaintance of Admiral Kusaki,
and the crew of the Rage is threatened with starvation*

Again there were fogs, grey clouds, a chilly sea, again one wore a fur coat on watch.

One frosty day we were proceeding on course when suddenly there was a deafening boom. It wasn't quite an explosion, nor quite a thunderbolt—we just couldn't place it.

We listened: there was a silence, then another boom. And silence again.

I noted the direction and steered the *Rage* towards the puzzling phenomenon. Soon we sighted a kind of floating hill on the horizon. When we approached it, we saw it was not a hill at all but a cloud of dense fog. Suddenly a column of water rose from its centre and a hollow rumble shook the *Rage* from top to bottom.

It was rather scary, but curiosity and the desire to enrich science by the solution of so puzzling a phenomenon won over caution, and I edged the yacht into the fog. As we advanced, I noticed the icicles dropping from our rigging and the temperature rising. I dipped my hand in the water overboard, and it was almost hot. Then I saw a vague shape ahead,

something like a huge chest. Suddenly the chest heaved and gave a huge “ah-choo!”

Then I understood. A sperm-whale had blundered into these cold climes from the Pacific, caught cold and was now down with flu, running a high temperature and sneezing. That’s why the water was warm.

Of course we could have used the chance and harpooned the whale, but it seemed a shame to take advantage of a sick animal. That is against my rules. What I did instead was to put a good dose of aspirin on a shovel and aim it right into the whale’s mouth. But the wind blew up that moment, a wave heaved the boat and I missed. Instead of the mouth the aspirin got into the whale’s blowhole, his nostrils, so to speak.

The whale took a deep breath, froze for a moment, closed its eyes and then forth came a really prodigious sneeze—and right at the yacht! The yacht literally soared into the sky, then began to descend, got into a spin and crashed down. The blow caused me to lose consciousness, and when I came to I saw that the *Rage* was lying on its side on the deck of a big man-of-war. Fooks was dangling in the air, entangled in the rigging, and Lom crouched nearby with a dazed air. From the far end of the deck a deputation was marching towards us, all wearing the uniforms of high-ranking naval officers.

I introduced myself. They did so too. It appeared they were representatives of an international committee for prevention of the dying-out of whales. And they proceeded to interrogate me as to my origins, destination, purpose, etc., asking whether I had seen any whales and if so, what measures I had taken to prevent them from dying out.

Well, I explained that mine was a sporting global cruise,

that I had met a sick sperm-whale and rendered it the aid medicine prescribes for such cases.

They heard me out, whispered among themselves and retired to confer. We sat there conferring too.

"They'll give us a commendation," Lom said. "Perhaps even a medal."

"What do I want with a medal," Fooks objected. "I'd rather have a money bonus."

I kept my own counsel, knowing it was always better to be prepared for the worst.

An hour passed, then another, and a third. We felt bored and nervous. So I decided to reconnoitre. They let me in. I sat in a corner and listened to the debates. At that moment a representative of an oriental power was in the middle of his speech.

"Our common aim is prevention of the dying out of whales. How are we to achieve this noble aim, I ask you? In my opinion, the most effective method is extermination, for when they are fully exterminated, none will be left to die out. Now let us examine the case in hand. Captain Wrungel, as he freely admits, had an excellent opportunity to exterminate the whale. And what did this cruel man do instead? He evaded his lofty duty and left the unfortunate animal to die out. Can we ignore this flagrant shirking of Man's duty to animals? No, gentlemen, we cannot. We must punish the criminal. I suggest his boat is taken away from him and given to my compatriots, who never flinch in carrying out the tasks of this committee..."

A representative of another power, this time from the West, I forget his name, something like Grabenfrukt, rose on a point of order:

"I fully agree with Herr Kusaki that Captain Wrungel

deserves punishment. But I must point out that the honoured admiral has overlooked the most important aspect of the matter: as distinct from other cetaceans, the sperm-whale has an elongated skull, typical of the Aryan race. So in insulting the sperm-whale, Captain Wrungel has insulted the entire Aryan race. Do you think we Aryans will stand for it?"

I had heard enough to realise we had landed in the soup, so to speak. I sneaked out of the conference room and told my ship-mates of the way the wind was blowing. This dampened their spirits considerably. Still, there was nothing for it but to await the decision of the whale-lovers.

The conference lasted all day, and towards evening a resolution was passed. We had prepared ourselves for the worst and had mentally said goodbye to the *Rage*. But it was not as bad as we had feared. The resolution was in the nature of a tentative one: "To set up a commission for the study of the matter, placing meanwhile the yacht *Rage* with its crew on one of the nearby desert islands."

Naturally I lodged a protest, but to no avail. The *Rage* was hitched up by a crane and lowered on to the rocks. They put us ashore as well, raised their many flags, hooted a goodbye and were off. There was nothing for it, but to submit to brute force and settle down on the island as best we could. And our best was not nearly too good, let me tell you. The yacht was lying on the edge of a cliff, its mast sticking out over the sea, and gloomy breakers splashing at the foot of the cliff.

We decided to begin with making a round of our new abode. It was a sorry little island and no mistake—nothing but bare rocks. And it was cold on it too. But at least we could help that latter evil, for there was no shortage of firewood. The island was heaped with wreckage.

But one cannot live on fuel alone. We had no provisions left, and there was no observable flora or fauna on the island. We could not very well make a stew of stones.

They say appetite comes with eating. Perhaps it is so with some people, but I am a kind of freak. I work up an appetite when I have not eaten for a long time.

Determined to fight this abnormality of mine, I tightened my belt and tried not to think about food. Lom and Fooks also behaved stoically. We tried fishing, but caught nothing. Lom remembered that in the old times stranded seamen cooked their boot soles. He put his boots in a pan and cooked them for two days, but nothing came of it. And no wonder, seeing that in the old times they made boots of bullock hides, while ours were of synthetic rubber. They served their purpose well enough in wet weather, but their culinary qualities were exactly nil—neither a good taste, nor any nourishment.

We were getting very low in the mouths, wandering around our yacht, watching the horizon and casting hungry looks at each other. The ghost of starvation was looming very large indeed. At night we were tormented by nightmares.

Then one day an icefloe came floating along, with several dozen penguins lined up on it. They nodded to us in greeting and I nodded back, wondering all the time how to make a closer acquaintance of them. The shore was a steep drop and there was no going down it, while penguins were not likely to fly up to us, polite as we were to them. Their wings are just an adornment, you know. On the other hand, the birds were fat and appetising we could not afford to let them slip through our fingers.

There we stood, atop the cliff, looking longingly down at them. The icefloe nudged the shore right beneath our mast.



Barrel.



Still life.

Penguin trap.



The penguins cawed, waved their wings and stamped their feet, looking up at us with as much longing, it seemed, as we at them.

An idea began to form in my head. I made the necessary calculations and decided to build a penguin lift, if you know what I mean.

We took an empty barrel, nailed a spare steering wheel to it, made a hole in the bottom and stuck it onto our mast. Over it we laid a storm ladder tied to make a continuous belt. I dry-ran the device, and it seemed to be working well. The only thing lacking was a bait. What kind of attraction could I use?

I tried a boot, but the penguins did not pay the least attention to it. We lowered a mirror, and the result was the same. We next tried a scarf and a meat-mincer, but nothing seemed to work.

Then I had a real brainwave. In my cabin I had a picture on the wall, a still life showing a boiled carp under cream sauce. It was a present from an artist friend of mine. The fish was very life-like indeed.

Well, I lowered the picture and the penguins looked at it with a lively interest, even came up closer to see it better. The nearest bird stepped on the ladder and strained to reach the carp. I gave the barrel a spin, and one bird was caught.

It went on nice and fast. I sat on the mast, spinning the barrel with one hand and picking up the birds with another and then handing them over to Fooks. Fooks passed them on to Lom, who counted them, and registered and then set them free on the island. In a matter of three hours, the island had received its penguin population.

Well, after we had finished the penguin procurement operation, things looked brighter. There were the penguins

wandering about and raising a merry gaggle, and there was Lom, apron-clad, cooking our first meal in many days. He fried the first penguin on a spit, and we gobbled it up there and then, without sitting down. Our pangs appeased, we set about carting firewood for the kitchen, and Lom built a huge fire. It was some fire, let me tell you. The smoke rose in a column, like from a volcano, the rocks became so hot they nearly glowed, and the little ice-cap on the top of the island melted and formed a boiling lake. I thought we might just as well have a bath and wash our clothes too. We washed our things and hung them out to dry, and themselves enjoyed a fine steam-bath. But there I made a mistake, carried away by a Russian's love of hot baths. I should have remembered that weather in the Antarctic is extremely changeful. Instead, I tossed on some more firewood.

Well, the mistake became only too obvious in half an hour's time. With the rocks so hot you could not step on them and the hot air rising up with a rumble like in a huge chimney, we disrupted the balance of air masses in the atmosphere. Cold currents rushed in, clouds gathered overhead, and it began to pour. And then there was a deafening crash.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

*in which Wrungel
is separated from his boat and his first mate*

Blinded and deafened, I did not come to at once. When I did, I saw that half the island was gone, together with the yacht. Steam was swirling all around, winds were running riot, and boiled fishes were floating bellies up in the heaving sea. The heated rock had not withstood too quick a cooling and split into two. Poor Lom must have perished in the catastrophe, and the *Rage* was gone too. So much for our dreams. Fooks was in one piece though. He was spinning in the sea clinging to a board.

Well, I decided it was not a bad idea, swam over to a board too, lay flat on it and awaited developments. Soon the sea calmed down and the wind subsided. Fooks and I fished out as much boiled fish as our boards could carry and surrendered ourselves to the mercy of the elements. We curled up on our boards and floated on parallel course in an unknown direction exchanging halloos from time to time: "How's life, Fooks?" "It's okay, Cap! Everything under control!"

Under control, my foot! It was a sorry kind of trip, let me tell you. We were cold, wet and anxious. There was no

knowing whether we were going to reach some dry land. And we were not given much room for manoeuvre. We were afraid to paddle or anything lest we attract sharks. Before you knew where you were you'd be short of an arm or a leg.

So we spent our time in idleness and despondency. A day passed, then another. I soon lost count of days and nights. We had no calendar with us, all we could do was to check our ideas of time with each other.

Then one night, when Fooks was sleeping on his board and I was suffering from insomnia, I decided to try and take my bearings. Without any instruments or tables, of course, I could not expect the reckoning to be precise. Still, I managed to establish that on that very night we crossed the International Date Line.

You must be aware, young man, that this line can only be seen on a map, while in the open sea it is not observable at all. But people, crossing this line, perform a certain operation with the calendar. If they are sailing from west to east, they give the same date to two consecutive days, and if they sail from east to west, they skip one day altogether, having the day after tomorrow follow today, so to speak.

So the next morning I informed Fooks after our usual morning greetings:

"I want you to know, Fooks, that today is really tomorrow."

He stared at me incomprehendingly and said stubbornly: "No, it isn't. I know my arithmetics, Cap."

"Arithmetics has got nothing to do with it, Fooks," I told him. "Sailors take their cue from astronomy. While you slept through the night I made an observation by the Fishes."

"I make my observation by the fishes too!" Fooks shouted. "Yesterday I had three fishes left, and today one and a half."

I have a ration of one fish and a half a day. So it can't be tomorrow yet."

I saw he wasn't with me. I meant the Fishes as a constellation, and Fooks spoke about his diet. I tried to explain: "Now, Fooks, look—what have you got right over your head?"

"My hat!"

"Nonsense!" I shouted. "Hat yourself! You have the zenith above you!"

"What senate? God almighty, perhaps?"

"Aw, let it ride," I spat in disgust. "And what have you got underneath you?"

"What do you think? A board!"

"Not at all. You've got the nadir."

"I can't float on an idea. It's a very material board."

There was no getting through to him. I made one last attempt: "What do you think your longitude is?"

Without stopping to think, Fooks measured his board with his fingers and shouted:

"About five feet I'd say!"

What can you do with an ignoramus like that? I decided that this was no time to instruct him in navigation and astronomy and ordered to discontinue the counting of days. If we got into a civilised country, they would tell us. And out in the open sea it did not matter if the shark gobbled you up yesterday, today or tomorrow.

Well, we drifted along for a few more days, and then one morning I saw a dark strip of land on the horizon. I wondered if these were the Sandwich Islands.

We approached them towards evening. I had been right, it was the Hawaii.



We had been lucky. The Hawaii are a heavenly place. Of course they used to have their shortcomings in the past. People were apt to get eaten there, Captain Cook was eaten for one.

But the natives had long died out on the islands, the whites have nobody to eat, and there is no one to eat the whites, so all is nice and quiet. In all other respects the islands are a paradise on earth. The greenery is lush beyond description, with pineapples, bananas and palm-trees all over the place. But the greatest attraction is the Waikiki beach in Honolulu. People come here from all over the world to swim and to surf. Surfing, riding the waves on a board, is a traditional sport here, invented by the Kanakas.

Jolly good show, if one thinks of it, riding a wave upright. And there were the two of us, clinging to our boards like blind kittens. I suddenly felt ashamed. Let's see if I can stand up on my board. I carefully picked myself up, straightened and stretched out my arms. And I kept my balance too! Standing upright!

Fooks rose too. He stood there, holding onto his hat, swaying. But he kept his balance as well, and the surf carried us along in clouds of spray, like sea demi-gods. The beach came ever closer, then the wave broke, and we slid onto the beach like on a toboggan.



CHAPTER TWELVE

*in which Wrungel and Fooks
give a small concert and then hurry on to Brazil*

On the beach a crowd of holiday-makers in bathing suits surrounded us, gaping, clapping, taking photographs. And the two of us looking as bedraggled as anything! Without my uniform and stripes I felt extremely awkward and decided I would conceal my name and rank and remain incognito, so to speak.

So I put a finger to my lips to indicate to Fooks that he should keep his mouth shut. But the onlookers thought I was blowing a kiss, and it caused a new burst of delight on the shore. They shouted "Vivat!" like mad, while I understood nothing. Still I did not let on and just awaited developments.

At this point a young chap in a coat began to explain to the scantily clad public that it was a mistaken notion that all natives of the Sandwich Isles had died out since the onset of civilisation here. The administration of the Waikiki beach had found two live native Hawaiians who had just demonstrated their prowess in the traditional national sport.

We both kept mum.

The chap in the coat paused, then cleared his throat and launched into a lecture:

“Natives of the Sandwich Isles, the Hawaiians or Kanakas, as they are also referred to, are distinguished by a slim build, gentle disposition and natural gift for music...”

I considered the description and saw it did not quite fit me. Well, I am gentle enough, but not exactly of a slim build, and as for musical gifts... The chap, meantime, continued:

“Tonight these two Kanakas will give a concert of Hawaiian music. Tickets are on sale in the booking office, the prices are quite reasonable and soft drinks will be provided in the interval...”

He talked on for a while, then took us aside and asked:

“Well, how’s that for a build-up?”

“Not bad,” I answered, “thank you.”

“Fine!” he said. “And where are you staying?”

“So far we’ve been staying in the Pacific. I don’t know about tonight. I can’t say I liked it too much.”

“That’s strange,” he said. “The *Pacific* is an excellent hotel. You won’t find a better one, I assure you. But we must be going. The concert begins in half an hour.”

He packed us into a car and brought us some place. There they gave us guitars, decked us out with flowers, led onto the stage and raised the curtain...

I saw we were expected to sing. But to sing what? In my confusion I forgot all the songs I had ever known. Even Fooks, resourceful as he was, looked at a loss. He stared at me and whispered: “Begin, Cap, and I’ll join in...”

We sat on our chairs silently for a few minutes. The public was beginning to fidget, and it was either sing or be pelted



1 Hawaiian

with rotten eggs. Well, I shut my eyes tight, strummed the strings and broke out into:

A bird was hopping in the field...

For the life of me I could not think of the next line. But at this point Fooks supplied in his treble:

A cow stole up and sprang...

After this we sang in a duet:

She snapped the jaws,

The birdie squealed,

And nevermore it sang.

And what do you think—they applauded like mad!

The compere came out onto the stage:

“That,” he said, “was an old Hawaiian song, which revives a forgotten method of bird-catching. The melodic structure is typical of Hawaiian music...”

We sang some encores, bowed ourselves off the stage and went to the office to collect our fee. Then we started back for the beach. We had nowhere else to go and the sea had become a sort of home element. Besides, our getups were most suitable for the beach.

As we rambled along the empty beach we espied two characters in very despondent attitudes. We came up and fell to talking. They complained to us:

“You call this respect for the acting profession? We signed a contract to represent native Hawaiians, spent a whole month learning to surf, prepared a programme of songs, and they seem to have forgotten all about us.”

So that’s what had happened! I was about to explain it all to them, but a scrap of newspaper was at that moment swept right under my feet. It was a long time I had a newspaper in my hands, so I picked the scrap up and started reading it. And

can you imagine it? The first thing I saw was the photograph of my first mate Lom and the *Rage*. It seemed to have been wrecked off the Brazilian shore. There were also a few touching words about Fooks and me: "the daring explorers", "sadly missing", "a great loss", etc.

On the same newspaper sheet there was a huge ad of the Trans-Pacific Airlines: "Regular flights to the United States and Brazil..."

"Listen to me, Fooks," I said. "Go and buy air tickets to Brazil. And order some clothes for us too. A uniform for me and whatever you fancy for yourself."

Fooks dashed away with great alacrity, while I stayed on the beach to keep the fake Hawaiians from going to the theatre to make enquiries. The last thing I wanted was to be detained here over some foolish misunderstanding.

"Look here," I suggested, "it does not seem likely anyone will come looking for you today, so what's the point of sitting here and moping. Why not hire a boat and go for a ride? It's nice and warm, and there's the full moon..."

I talked them into it too! Before we started, Fooks was back reporting:

"The clothes will be ready tonight, but I only bought one ticket for tomorrow's flight—for you, Captain. All sold out."

"Never mind," I said, "We'll attend to business tomorrow. Right now we are going for a ride."

It was a lovely jaunt, let me tell you. We saw all the sights and came back two hours before our flight was scheduled. Taking leave of our new friends the actors, we dashed off to the tailor. The scoundrel must have gone on a spree, because our things were not ready.

I stormed at him, but the wily rogue merely shrugged his shoulders.

“Why, I expected you yesterday, and today nothing is ready yet.”

Isn't it lovely logic?

“Give me something to wear then,” I said to him. “I can't board a plane wearing nothing but shorts, can I?”

“This is the only thing I can offer,” he said producing a mackintosh from his wardrobe. “A gentleman ordered it last year, but hasn't come to collect it for some reason.”

“Very well,” I said. “How much is it?” I paid up, took the parcel, and we left.

“I'd try it on if I were you, sir,” Fooks advised. “What if it does not fit you?”

Indeed, it was a sound idea. I unwrapped the mackintosh in the shade of a banyan tree, and put it on. I was out of luck again. The gentleman who had ordered it must have been twice as tall as I—or perhaps he expected to grow. At any rate, the skirts trailed on the ground.

What was I to do? Take it back—that rogue of a tailor had nothing else. Cut off the skirts—it would be a dreadfully crude job, and they'd probably refuse me admission on board the airplane. Wearing it as it was was also out of the question—I'd be tripping on the skirts and stumbling all the time. While I was racking my brains, Fooks came up with a real whopper of an idea.

“Why!” he cried, “it's splendid! We'll both board the plane in this here mackintosh—with one ticket. Bend you down, Captain, let me climb your shoulders.”

And he scrambled onto my shoulders, put on the mackintosh, buttoned it up and straightened it.

EVENTS

Smoke from my pipe
caused a panic in the
airplane.



“Now full steam ahead,” he commanded, “for I see a policeman taking an interest in us.”

Off I trotted to the airport. Fooks showed the ticket and the stewardess led us to our seat. We sat down, that is I sat down, while Fooks stood on the seat, his head nearly propping the ceiling.

I peeped through a buttonhole and saw that there were five more passengers besides us, all belted in their seats already. It was nice and clean in the salon, there were mirrors and carpet-runners, and the passengers seemed a decent lot.

Soon the engines roared, the airplane skimmed the water and we became airborne. The night was calm and starry, and the flying was very peaceful, despite the noise of the engines. The other passengers fell asleep, I dozed off too, and Fooks alone stayed awake and standing all night long.

I woke up in the morning to hear the passengers chatting excitedly. I peeped through the buttonhole and saw them all glued to the portholes admiring the view of the Andes. Fooks also bent down to the porthole, while I was condemned to sitting in the darkness like a prisoner in a solitary cell and missing such a lovely sight.

I felt terribly deprived. To cheer myself up, I took my pipe out of the mackintosh pocket, filled it, lit up and fell to thinking. Suddenly the salon resounded with alarmed cries. The passengers had jumped up from their seats in a panic, and I could hear the word “Fire!” repeated on all sides.

Then Fooks kicked me with his heels as though urging on a donkey. I pinched him in return and looked through the buttonhole to see what the commotion was all about.

I saw clouds of smoke erupting from every opening in my mackintosh. Indeed, it was not unlike a fire.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*in which Wrungel makes short shrift
of an anaconda and is once again decently attired*

I shook the ashes onto the floor, put the sparks out with my heel and shoved the pipe back into my pocket. There I sat, as quiet as a mouse, hoping the panic would somehow abate. Then the pilot poked his head in. I felt hopeful: after all he must have been in worse predicaments, he ought to calm them down. Instead, the pilot lost his head himself.

I saw him blanch, gasp and clutch at some lever or other. There was a bang and then the roar of the engines stopped and all we could hear was the wind whistling outside. There was a plop above us, the salon jerked and then floated smoothly.

The other passengers were at their wits' ends, but I had already tumbled to it. Today every schoolboy knows about the catapult by means of which the pilot saves himself in an extremity. But in those days it was the latest gadget which was called "Go thee down." In the case of an explosion, fire or some other disaster on board the plane, say if a wing fell away, the pilot pulled the lever, which separated the cabin from the rest of the aircraft, and it was parachuted down. A very

useful contraption no doubt, but in our case its application was obviously premature.

It was pointless to object or argue: the plane had gone on its course, while our cabin was floating slowly down. The smoke had almost dispersed, but the passengers were not in the least reassured. On the contrary, feelings were running very high, and even Fooks felt jerky. Any moment I could expect him to jump up and pull the mackintosh off me. I was the only one to keep my head.

Of course the flight had been interrupted and the ticket invalidated, but still I did not like the idea of everybody's attention focussing on me, of providing explanations and perhaps even trying to deny the charges of causing the entire unpleasantness. I did not relish the role of the accused and so decided to take advantage of the commotion to pass myself off for an outsider. The moment was very propitious: the passengers were frantic, some had even swooned, and the emergency exit was right above us in the ceiling.

Have you ever swum in the Amazon, young man? You haven't? And don't you try it. I assure you it's not worth the thrill. *I* know, because I've tasted the doubtful pleasure.

Fooks and I scrambled out through the emergency exit and took our bearings. Underneath us was a river, and in a few seconds the cabin plopped right in the middle of it.

I bent over the hatch and shouted inside:

"Welcome to the Amazon, ladies and gentlemen! Pleased to greet you in these wild and inaccessible parts."

The passengers began to climb out one after another. Seeing there was no immediate danger, they calmed down somewhat and centred their attention on Fooks and me. I saw I

had to introduce myself. Since I could not tell them the truth, I had to invent a plausible story.

“Allow me to introduce myself: Professor of geography Christopher Wrungel, on a scientific expedition in central South America. This is my servant and guide Fooks, a local Indian. I’ve been here quite a while and am used to the locality. Allow me to consider you my guests.”

“Of course,” they chorussed. “With pleasure.”

But I could see they did not put much faith in my words: some professor, indeed, wearing nothing but shorts. I felt I had to give them other food for thought, so I asked: “Are you all here?”

They glanced round and one passenger said, “No, there was also a tall gentleman.”

“That’s right,” another confirmed, “a tall gentleman who went on fire.”

“Is that so?” I asked. “Go down into the cabin, Fooks, and see if he is there and if he needs medical aid.”

Several minutes later Fooks was out, handing me a pinch of ashes—that was all that was left of the tall gentleman, if you please.

“Oh,” I said, “how terribly sad. The tall gentleman seems to have burnt to a cinder. Well, may the Lord God rest his soul... Now, ladies and gentlemen, let us pull the parachute in, it will come in handy yet.”

We each took a shroud line and started pulling. I gave commands: “Heave ho, all together!” Somehow the parachute did not seem to be coming any nearer, though they all did their best. Suddenly I saw them drop their shroud lines and run aft, so to speak, pressing close together and trembling with fear. As for Fooks, he dived head first into the hatch, then

peered out of there and pointed a trembling finger towards the parachute. And our one lady passenger stood on tiptoe, spread out her fingers, waved her arms, as though she was trying to fly up and screamed.

I looked round, and all but screamed myself. In the parachute I saw a huge anaconda, no less than thirty metres in length. It lay there curled up and looked us over appraisingly, as though trying to decide which was the juiciest morsel.

And I had no weapon except for the pipe in my teeth.

"Fooks!" I shouted, "give me something heavy!"

Fooks handed me some kind of missile, quite a hefty one.

"Hustle up some more!" I shouted and aimed the missile.

The anaconda seemed to be aiming as well. He opened his cave-like maw, and I threw my missile right into it.

But what is a small thing like that to an anaconda? He swallowed it without so much as making a face and opened his mouth again. I let fly again, and dashed to the hatch shouting to Fooks: "Give me whatever else you have there!"

Suddenly I heard a strange hissing noise behind me. I looked round and saw the anaconda swelling. The hissing was coming from its mouth together with a lot of foam.

"He'll jump me now," I thought.

Instead the anaconda dived into the Amazon and disappeared from view.

We stood rooted to the spot waiting to see what would happen next. A minute passed, then another. The passengers seemed to be coming to and stirring, when the same lady assumed the same flying up stance and started screaming again.

And what did we see? A huge shiny balloon rose to the

Longitude
Latitude

EVENTS

Port
registrations

60° east long.
9° north lat.

Defeated an anaconda with the
help of five extinguishers.

← Skin of the
exploded
anaconda.



surface, monstrous in shape and very odd in colouring. It kept getting bigger and bigger.

Now, what can it be, I wondered. It felt creepy. Then I saw that the balloon had a tail which was thrashing frantically and realised it was the poor anaconda whom I had stuffed full of fire-extinguishers. They must have hit against each other in his stomach and started to discharge, pumping the anaconda full of foam. Do you know what the pressure is in a fire-extinguisher? The poor serpent had acquired excessive buoyancy and, beat his tail as he might, could not dive.

My fear was dispelled at once.

"Get out, Fooks," I said. "There is no more danger."

Fooks climbed out and stood admiring the inflated anaconda, while the passengers rushed over to thank me for rescuing them.

"Nothing to it," I replied modestly. "What is in an anaconda? I've been in tighter spots."

Well, this incident certainly strengthened my prestige. Moreover, the problem of my attire was solved too. The lady passenger had a needlework basket with her, and I borrowed thread and needle and made myself a jacket out of the parachute cloth. It was beautiful blue cloth, and for buttons I used the screw-bolts from the cabin walls. It was all very nice and shiny, the only thing was you needed a spanner to get in and out of the jacket. But one gets used to small inconveniences. As for Fooks, we found him ready-made overalls in the emergency supply, so he was now decently clad too.

Then we cut out some sails, put up a mast and set down the Amazon, sustaining ourselves on fish and tortoises. The lady passenger proved to be a passable cook, and life was tolerable, except that our boat was too cranky and slow.

Still, we crept along east, towards the Atlantic. It took us a month and a half to reach it. The banks of the Amazon teemed with monkeys, lianas, rubber trees, and what not—to last the most curious of travellers a lifetime. But it was a trying experience all the same. The weather was bad, it was the rainy season. It was hot and wet, fogs as thick as jelly, and swarm of mosquitoes. It was a wonder none of us caught yellow fever.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*at the beginning of which Wrungel finds himself
in deadly peril and in the end is reunited with the Rage*

At long last we reached the port town of Para. The town, truth to be told, was nothing to write home about—dirty, dusty, hot, with swarms of stray dogs overrunning the streets. But after the wilds of the Amazon it was an outpost of civilisation, though the local people, frankly speaking, did not look over-civilised. Actually, they were of a savage aspect and all wore knives at their belts. Just walking in the street was a scary business.

Well, we cleaned up and shaved after our trying trip, my companions said goodbye to me, boarded ships and sailed home. Fooks and I would have liked to go too, but we had no papers, and they would not let us out. There we were, like crabs on a shallow bank, stranded in a strange country, with no shelter, no employment and no means of subsistence. We tried looking for a job, but there were too few jobs going, except as labourers at rubber plantations. That meant going back up the Amazon, and the idea did not attract us at all—we had had our fill of the river.

We wandered about the town for a while and finally sat down on a bench in a park to discuss the situation.

Suddenly a policeman approached us and said the governor wanted to see us. It was a flattering invitation to be sure, but I do not relish all these official receptions and meeting various VIPs. Still, we were not in a position to decline the summons, so off we went.

The governor proved to be a hippopotamus of a man, who received us sitting in a bath, fan in hand, snorting and splashing in true hippopotamus fashion. On both sides of the bath stood two aides in dress uniform.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” the governor asked us.

I said: “This is my sailor Fooks, whom I took on in Calais. And I am Captain Wrungel. Perhaps you have heard of me?”

When he heard my name, the governor gasped, dropped his fan and sank into the water, head and all. He might have drowned too if the aides did not come to the rescue. They pulled him out, purple and coughing. After he had regained his breath he said:

“What? That same Captain Wrungel? What’s going to happen now? Rioting, fires, revolution, reprimands, demotion... Oh no! I admire your courage of course and have nothing against you personally, but as a representative of the Federal government I insist that you leave the territory under my jurisdiction at once. Issue the Captain an exit permit, Lieutenant!”

The aide had the paper ready in no time, put a stamp on it and handed it to me. This suited me to a T. I bowed, saluted and said:

“Much obliged, Your Excellency! I am only too ready to carry out your order. May I go now?”

With these words I turned on my heel and walked out, Fooks following. We made straight for the harbour. Suddenly we heard the noise of stamping feet behind. I glanced back and saw some forty characters, wearing top boots and broad-brimmed hats and carrying knives and automatic machine-guns giving us chase and shouting: "There they are, catch them, hold them!"

Well, it looked like they were after us. The last thing I wanted was to be caught and held. There was nothing for it but run. We ran some distance, but I soon got winded and had to stop for a breather by some kind of a booth. You can't do much running, you know, in that heat and at my time of life. Fooks, now, was as fresh as a daisy—he was a man of slight build and running came easy to him. Still, the turn of events had alarmed him too. He was pale and his eyes were darting here and there. Suddenly he brightened up and gave me a familiar slap on the back.

"You just stay here, Captain," he said, "and I'll run along. You are quite safe where you are."

And he broke into a gallop.

I did not expect him to leave me in the lurch like that and was quite upset, to tell the truth. The only thing left was to climb a palm tree. Well, I started climbing one, hearing the chase approaching with every second. Half way up the tree I glanced down, and at a closer range they looked even more frightening—all great hulking men, with fierce visages and yelling mouths. I felt quite weak with fear, if truth be told. It looked as though all was up with me. I clung to the palm for dear life. They were already milling at the foot of the tree snorting and stamping. From what they said to each other I gathered that they were a posse of plainclothesmen and not a

mob of scalp-hunters as I had thought. The governor, it transpired, had had a change of heart, regretted his amiability and sent them after Fooks and me. To arrest us and clap us down in prison.

For some reason they hesitated to go after me. Five minutes passed, ten. My hands were dreadfully tired and I just barely held on. Another moment and I'd drop down. What the hell, I thought, be as it may. And I crawled down. Not one of the posse approached me though. I looked at them in wonderment and then started down the street. They made way for me hastily.

I came back to the bench in the park where the policemen had delivered the governor's summons and dozed off. At dawn Fooks woke me up.

"Good morning, Captain," he greeted me. "What did I say—you *were* safe."

"Yes, but why?"

"That's why," he said, walking behind me and peeling off my back a warning sign with scull and crossbones. I don't know where he had pinched it—most probably that booth housed a transformer and bore this sign. At any rate he had saved me.

We had a good laugh about the incident. Fooks, it appeared, had not wasted time. He had bought tickets for a steamer. During embarkation I showed the governor's exit permit and they let us through without a murmur, even wished us *bon voyage*. We had a decent state-room and travelled in style as far as Rio de Janeiro.

Once there we started making inquiries and found out that the *Rage* had been tossed out ashore not far from the city. It was damaged of course, but Lom had had her repaired, and

propped her up on shore awaiting further orders. He had had a long wait, as you can understand, since I had been otherwise engaged, and he lived like a hermit in a shack on the beach.

Fooks and I hired a local cab—a kind of basket on wheels—and went to the address we had been given in search of my yacht and first mate. As we were riding along the seashore, we had a chance to observe a sad but instructive picture illustrating the local economic pattern. Some two hundred porters were moving in a line from a warehouse to the water's edge, dumping sugar into the sea by the sackful. The sea was thick as syrup, the bees and flies were swarming in a cloud above. We wondered what all this was about and were told that the demand for sugar had dropped and the prices were so low that it made better sense, economically speaking, to dump sugar into the sea than sell it cheap. In this way the prices would be stabilised and the living standard raised. In other words, it was the right thing to do and there was nothing to be surprised at. We shook our heads and drove on.

Soon we sighted our beauty on the shore, waiting for her indomitable captain in the company of a fierce-looking character. He wore a hat as wide as an umbrella, pants with a fringe and a knife on his belt. He made a beeline for us, and my heart sank—they were too free with their knives for my liking here.

But no, it was not a local thug attacking us, it was Lom beyond himself with delight. He had simply adopted the local dress fashion, that's all.

We hugged and even cried a little, and spent the evening telling each other about our adventures. The next morning we knocked the wedges from under the keel, launched the *Rage* and hoisted the flag. I was moved to tears, young man,

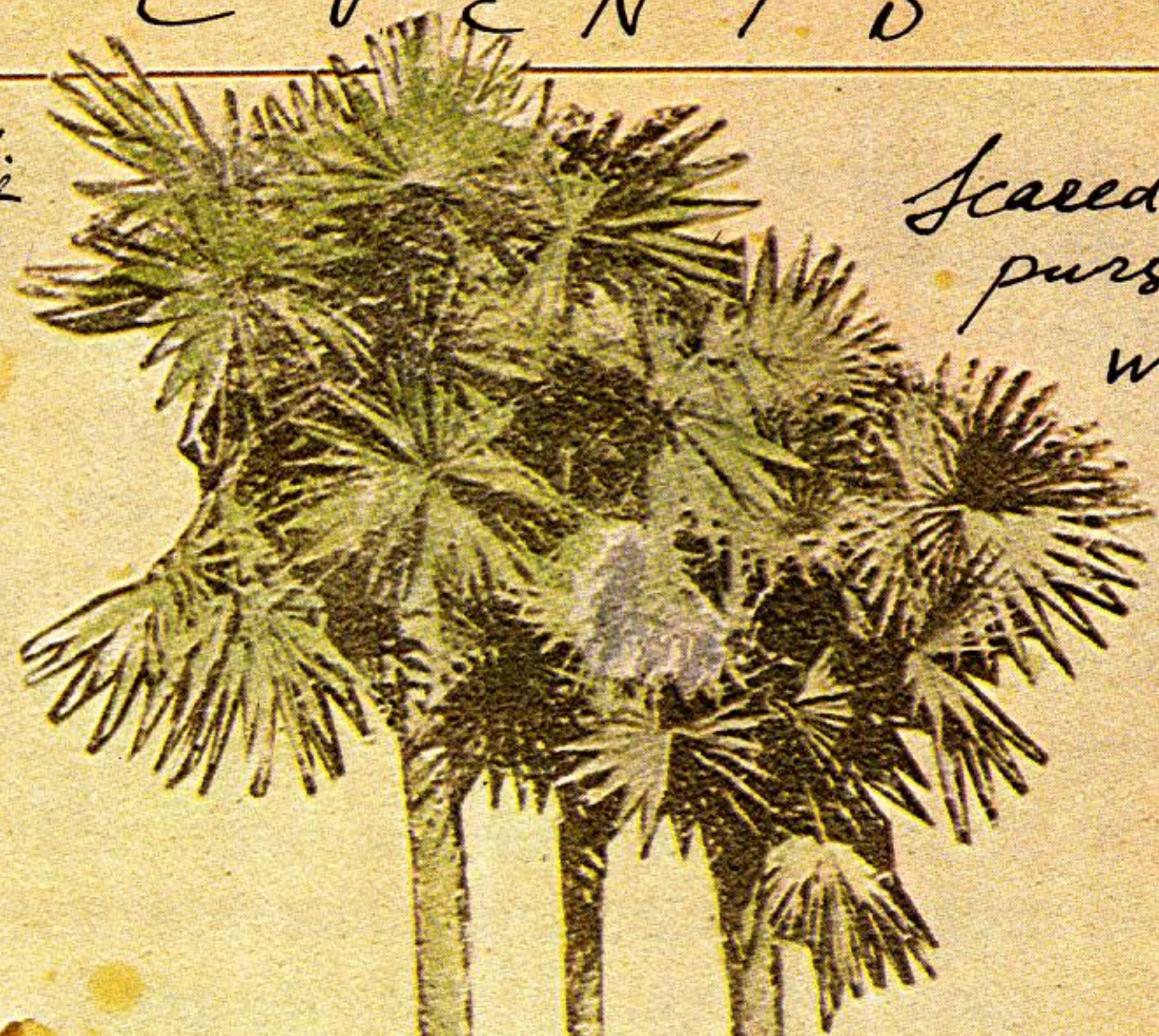
Longitude
Latitude

E V E N T S

Port
registrations

52° east long.
3° north lat.

Scared off the
pursuers with a
warning sign



Pursuers



indeed I was. It is a great joy you know, to find yourself back on your own deck. We could now continue our cruise. All that was left was to settle matters with the port authorities.

I did not expect any trouble there. So I came to the captain of the port, "commandante del baja" as they call him, and asked for clearance.

But at the sight of me the port captain got all purple in the face and started yelling his head off:

"Oh, so you are the captain of the *Rage*? A troublemaker, that's what you are! I've got a sheaf of complaints from all over the world about you. Admiral Kusaki says you've destroyed an island and harassed a sperm-whale. Our governor reports you have left the port of Para without his permission..."

"That's not true," I said, "here's his permit. Allow me..."

"No I won't!" he stormed. "I won't allow anything. You cause nothing but trouble! Get out!" And he yelled:

"Lieutenant! Have that yacht sunk at once!"

Greatly troubled, I hurried back to my boat. On the shore near our camp I found an official in charge of the sinking operation. They had not lost any time.

"Is that the yacht to be sunk?" he asked me. "Don't you worry, sir, we'll do it in a jiffy."

I was at my wits' end. Once the yacht is sunk, try and salvage it from the bottom! But again my resourcefulness saved the day.

"What are you going to use for ballast, young man?" I inquired. "Sand? Surely it's too much of a bother. Why not load it with those sacks of sugar they are dumping into the sea over there? The sacks are ready and tied, and your task will be lightened considerably."

"That's true," he said. "Good idea."

The porters ran along the gangway one after another, filling the hold with sacks, packing the house full, and then dumping them on deck. My poor *Rage* sank deeper and deeper under the weight, and soon just the masts remained visible. Then there was a gurgle and the masts disappeared as well. Fooks and Lom watched the sinking of their beloved ship with tears in their eyes, whereas I was in the best of moods. I told my crew we would stay in camp until the *Rage* floated up again. And sure enough, in three days' time the sugar had melted and our yacht came up. We washed it, set sail and bade goodbye to the inhospitable coast. As we sailed off, I saw the port captain run out of his office yelling: "Come back at once! I won't allow it!"

And trotting alongside him was none but my old acquaintance Admiral Kusaki, berating the captain: "D'you call that keeping up your end of the deal, Commandant? Be so kind as to return the money you've been paid!"

"Sort it out between yourselves, you two tricksters," I thought, waved goodbye to them and set on course.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

in which Lom leaves the ship again

From Brazil our course lay west, but one cannot cross a continent in a sailing boat, as you understand, so we had to skirt South America. That took us south. The wind was fair, the sails rang, the rigging was taut, the bow cut a feather and the water foamed behind the stern. We ran along briskly, covering some two hundred miles in a day, and the crew had very little to do. Lom and Fooks grew terribly lazy, the discipline became lax, and I decided to find them jobs about the boat.

"Enough idling, Lom," I said. "Have a go at the brass parts. Polish them till they burn!"

"Aye, aye, sir," said Lom, ground some brick, took a rag and set about polishing.

I went down to have a nap, but was wakened by Fooks's cries on deck. I jumped up and ran to the companionway. At that moment Fooks clattered down, pale and trembling.

"Fire on board, Captain!" he cried.

I shot up on deck, and sure enough the planking was burning in two places, Lom, unconcerned, was squatting by

the bulwark and polishing a cleat. Suddenly I saw flames leaping up in that place too.

I was flabbergasted.

“Lom!” I yelled. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Lom rose calmly, saluted and reported:

“I am fulfilling your order, sir—polishing the brass parts until they burn.”

I was about to give him a good bawling out, but restrained myself. After all it was my own fault. A writer or an actor may permit themselves fancy language, but in seamanship one has to be precise. There must be no ambiguity in your language, for you never know how your command is going to be interpreted. Now Lom was a man in a thousand—industrious, painstaking, conscientious, but he always took your words literally. He was as strong as an ox, too, so you had to watch yourself if you did not want trouble.

Well, I set about correcting my mistake.

“Stop polishing the brass! Fire alarm!”

Fooks rushed to the bell. Lom, according to the fire bill, was to be at the site of the fire, and I to do the steering. Somehow these measures proved ineffective. The flames kept spreading and the sails could be expected to catch on any moment. I saw things were in a bad way, and turned the boat round in the wind’s eye. It helped, too. The wind blew the flames off the deck. For a while the flames flapped off like a kind of fiery train and then the train tore off and the fire was out. Fooks came out of his trance and Lom seemed to have understood that by his excessive zeal he had nearly caused the worst calamity that is known at sea.

We then reversed the course, changed the charred

planking of the deck and without further mishaps rounded Cape Horn, and entered the Pacific Ocean.

Here we fell on bad times. Near the coast of New Guinea we were overrun by a whopper of a typhoon. The *Rage* was tossed like a seagull, diving, surfacing, diving again. Mountains of water fell on the deck. The rigging groaned, the mast bent. Well, that's a typhoon for you.

Suddenly the yacht began spinning in one spot, and then the wind died down completely. Lom and Fooks, ignorant of typhoons' treacherous character, heaved a sigh of relief. But I knew what it meant and my heart sank. We were in the hub of the hurricane and it boded no good.

And indeed, after a brief lull, the wind again began to howl like a thousand devils. Within seconds the sails split across, the mast bent like a fishing-rod, snapped into two and fell overboard, sails, rigging and all. The *Rage* had been stripped clean.

When the ocean's fury abated a little, I took stock of the situation. The damage was great and irreparable. Of course we had spare sails and ropes in our hold, but what's the use of sails if you have no mast? Far from the ocean high roads as we were, we might drift in the middle of the Pacific for years.

Faced with the prospect of a slow death, I remembered my long life, as one is apt to do in such circumstances, thinking wistfully of my childhood with its innocent games.

And, believe it or not, this recollection gave me a key to salvation.

As a boy I was fond of flying kites. Why, I thought jubilantly, a kite is just the thing we want.

We used the baskets which contained the gifts we were given in parting to make the kite's frame. Then we boiled

some glue, collected all the paper that we had on board—books, newspapers, commercial correspondence and such like—and got down to gluing it all together. We made a first-class kite, take my word for it. I know what I am talking about. Well, when the structure was dry, we selected a long rope, waited till the wind rose and flew it.

It pulled splendidly. The yacht gathered speed and was again obedient to the helm.

Down in my cabin, I spread a map to choose the nearest port where we could dock for repairs. Suddenly I heard an odd sort of noise, like something was crackling on deck.

Alarmed, I ran up the companionway and saw a hair-raising picture: the rope attached to our kite had got caught on the windlass, and the friction had rubbed it so thin it literally held by a thread.

“All hands on deck!” I yelled.

Lom and Fooks dashed out on deck and stood there awaiting my orders.

But I could not think of the right order. What was wanted was a knot. But the wind was strong, the rope taut as a violin string, and there is no tying a string, you know.

I thought all was up with our new contraption, but here Lom’s herculean strength saved the day. He grabbed the rope with one hand and a shackle on the deck with another, strained his biceps ... and pulled the rope in some.

“Steady there!” I commanded, “Don’t let go under any circumstances!” and began tying a knot.

But at that moment a squall hit us, the kite gave a mighty tug, the shackle was pulled out of the planking like a carrot out of its bed, and Lom soared into the clouds with the last cry of “Aye, aye; sir!”

Fooks and I gazed after him as though thunderstruck. Within seconds our brave comrade was a black dot in the clouds, and then disappeared altogether, leaving us stranded in the middle of the ocean.

At last I came to and glanced at the compass to note the direction he had taken. I then evaluated the approximate strength of wind, and the conclusion was far from heartening. A force six wind was carrying my comrade at a speed of twenty-five miles an hour towards the shores of the Land of the Rising Sun. And the *Rage* was again bobbing helplessly on the waves, deprived of propulsion and out of control.

Unable to think of a thing to help Lom or ourselves, I decided to sleep on it and went down to my cabin. But as soon as I dozed off, Fooks woke me up: "Come up and have a look, Captain!" I rubbed my eyes of sleep, went up and, can you believe it!—saw a coral island to the right. A lagoon, palms on the beach, all as it should be. If we managed to land there we could get us a mast and put up some kind of sails. In other words, fortune had smiled on us, but alas, it proved to be a false smile.

Judge for yourself: the wind was driving us unhurriedly along, we soon came alongside the island, it was at an arm's length, so to speak, but we did not have an arm five hundred yards long. In a word, we were drifting past the island.

A less resourceful person might have lost his head, but not me. The recommended procedure in cases like this is to toss an anchor ashore on a long line. You can't toss it with your hand, naturally, you need a cannon or a rocket. I ran down to my cabin and started rummaging among my things. But no, there were neither rockets nor guns there, I had never thought of providing myself against this kind of an emergency.

Longitude
Latitude

EVENTS

Lom left the Rage,
flying away on a kite,
destination unknown



Instead I came across all manner of toilet articles, like ties, cuff-links, suspenders and such like. No good for me at all.

And once again, my childhood experiences suggested a way out.

You see, I cannot say I was a model child. On the contrary, I was universally regarded as something of a pain-in-the-hide. And one of my favourite pastimes was shooting from a catapult.

As soon as I thought about the catapult, it dawned on me that suspenders would make a very good one. So I grabbed six pairs of tight suspenders, ran up on deck and built a kind of huge catapult out of them.

The subsequent course of action was clear enough: we charged the catapult with a small anchor, then Fooks and I with the help of the windlass pulled it back as far as it would go, and I chopped off the rope-end. The anchor shot forth like an arrow, carrying a light but strong rope with it. I looked and saw all was in order: the anchor held.

Half an hour later we were on the island, and our axes resounded in the solemn silence of virgin forest.

It was hard work, of course, there being just the two of us, but we coped splendidly.

The typhoon had given us a thorough thrashing and there was a lot that needed doing to the yacht. We caulked the sides, tarred the bottom, set up a new mast and rigged the *Rage* out anew. As for the mast, we hit on a really ingenious idea: we dug out a slim palm-tree together with the roots and planted it in the hold, which we filled with soil in place of ballast. We made it fast with shrouds, all correct and seamanlike, and it took root after a few good waterings.



Long

Latit

Palm-Tree

Coconut

Latit

Then we cut out and sewed sails, clothed out yacht in proper canvas, and went on our way.

Of course the boat looked strange, with the green fronds waving overhead, and it was unusual handling her, but the palm gave nice shade, the greenery gladdened the eye, and soon the palm began to bear fruit too. You can't imagine how pleasant it is to break the monotony of the watch in scorching heat by climbing the mast and picking a young coconut full of a refreshing liquid. A floating plantation has its points, let me tell you.

Well, on we ran, our health fostered by fruit diet, steering a steady course for the site of Lom's supposed landing.

We sailed for two days and on the third sighted land right ahead. Through my telescope I could distinguish a harbour, approach beacons and a city on the shore.

It was quite a temptation to call there, but I decided against it. They did not welcome foreigners in Japan in those years, and seeing that their Admiral Kusaki had a bone to pick with me, I thought I'd give the city a miss. Once bitten twice shy.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

the saddest, because in it the Rage is lost beyond recall

So I gave the port a wide berth. We sailed on for another day, but towards evening such a thick fog blanketed the sea that I could not see my own hand. All around sounded horns, blew whistles and clanged bells. It was rather scary, but merry too. However, the merriment did not last long. I heard the noise of a high-speed boat approaching. When a torpedo boat loomed ahead, I swung to starboard—but so did she. I put the helm hard left—and she followed suit.

There was a terrific crash, water gushed on the deck, and the poor *Rage*, cleaved into two, began to sink slowly.

Now we've had it, I thought.

"Fooks," I said, "take a life-belt and swim west. It's not far."

"What about you, Captain?" Fooks asked.

"I have no time, I have to make the last entry in the log, take leave of my ship, and the main thing, I don't feel like visiting Japan."

"Neither do I, Captain. I'd rather go elsewhere."

"Why, Fooks," I reasoned. "It's dry land after all, picturesque country, Mount Fujiyama."

"What do I want with your Mount Fujiyama," Fooks retorted. "I'll never find a job there, and as for my old trade, no one can beat them at sleight of hand. They'll strip you clean in no time. I'd rather stay with you."

I was touched by his loyalty and felt a surge of strength. "What the hell," I thought, "when there's a will there's a way."

"All hands aboard!" I commanded. "Strip the rigging, fell the mast!" Fooks proved very handy at dismantling things. Of course, destruction comes easier than creation. In no time the palm-tree was overboard and floating. Fooks jumped down onto it, I passed down some of the valuables, dropped a ring-buoy, the compass together with the binnacle, a couple of oars, a cask of water, some clothes...

All this time I remained on the *Rage*. Then I felt its stern rising, the bow going steeply down—another moment and it would founder.

Tears sprang to my eyes. At this last moment I grabbed the axe and with my own hands chopped out the board carrying the ship's name.

Then I jumped into the water and was soon astride the palm-tree, watching the ocean swallow the remains of my long-suffering yacht.

Tears stood in Fooks's eyes too.

"Don't worry," I said to him and patted him on the shoulder. "Never say die."

Well, so we sat awhile, contemplating the spot where the waves had closed over the *Rage*, and then started setting house on our palm-tree. And we did not do so badly either, believe it or not.

Of course, we did not have all the modern conveniences, but we had everything essential for sailing. We mounted the

Longitude
Latitude

E V E N T S

Port
registrations

The Rage has sunk. We continue
the cruise on a
palm-tree.



compass, put up a kind of sail made of an old sailor's vest, hung a ring-buoy on a branch, while the board with the lettering served as my desk.

It was not too bad, but rather wet underfoot.

Before long we saw a whisp of smoke on the horizon. I thought it was that torpedo-boat again, but it proved to be a mere trader flying the British flag. I was not going to ask it for help thinking we'd make it somehow. But the captain, on sighting our sorry-looking craft and inspecting us through a spy-glass, decided that we needed assistance for all that we showed no signs of panic and sent no distress signals.

So half an hour later we were taken aboard his ship and the captain was treating me to a glass of rum.

I made him a present of my palm-tree, and he put it up in the mess-room. I also gave away the oars and the compass, but kept the ring-buoy and the letter-board as mementos of my *Rage*.

The captain told me he was on his way to Canada to take on a load of timber, we discussed news and then he went off leaving me with fresh newspapers.

Well, I leafed through the newspapers. It was the usual thing—advertisements and all kinds of one-day sensations. And suddenly, I saw a huge headline: "PROPAGANDA AIR-RAID. AGITATOR ESCAPED THE POLICE!"

I began to read and soon realised the whole hullabaloo was about Lom. He seemed to have landed on his kite in the Fuji foothills. Naturally this visitation attracted a huge crowd, and the kite was torn into shreds and taken away for souvenirs.

But don't forget that the kite was largely made of newspapers. So the police stepped in and accused Lom of

importing illegal literature. Things looked dim for Lom, but at that moment, fortunately for him, the sky became overcast and the earth began to rumble under their feet. The crowd fled the mountain slope in a panic, and Lom remained there alone in the company of Japanese policemen.

They stood thus, facing each other, with the earth heaving underneath them. This condition of the earth surface usually strikes fear into people's hearts, but Lom was a seasoned sailor and thought nothing of a bit of rolling. Blissfully unaware of the peril presented by elemental forces thus at play he turned and strolled up the slope. Suddenly the earth gaped, as they say, and a wide cleft separated him from his pursuers. Then soot and ashes started raining down, and all was obscured.

The police lost Lom's tracks, and he was now a wanted criminal.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*in which Lom makes
a sudden appearance and sings a song to himself*

That was all I could gather from the newspapers. But it was enough to upset me. On top of losing my boat, I had my first mate in a fix. Had I had my yacht I would have defied Kusaki and gone to rescue Lom. But here I was on board the trader and all I could hope for was to be brought to a Canadian port, where Fooks and I would be ourselves in a tight spot, our funds being quite slim. And the ship was barely crawling along too. So I went to the captain.

"Couldn't we put on speed?" I asked him.

"I'd be only too glad, but I haven't enough stokers, and those I have just barely manage to keep up the pressure."

Well, Fooks and I talked the matter over, rested for another day and then hired ourselves out to the captain as stokers. The wages were not big, but then we would be getting free board, we would have something to do to kill the time, and the ship would get a move on.

So we went on watch. They don't give you any overalls on traders, and we did not have any clothes to spare. So we

stripped down to shorts. Actually it was best, seeing that the heat was terrible. But we could not make up our minds about the footwear. With hot slag underfoot, we could not stand in our bare feet, but we were sorry to spoil our last shoes too.

But we thought of a way. We took four buckets, filled them with water and put our feet in them. It was a swell idea. We were quite comfortable in the buckets, like in galoshes, and if a live coal dropped out of the furnace into a bucket, it just gave a hiss and went out.

Being used to all kinds of work, I was coping with my job pretty well, but I could see Fooks wilting. He had stoked the furnace so full the coal baked into a crust, and Fooks was taking half-hearted pokes at this crust with a shovel.

“Hey!” I cried. “What’s the use of all this poking? One has to hit it really hard, using all one’s strength. Of course, what strength have you! Now if we had Lom with us ... I wonder where Lom is.”

“Lom’s here, sir!” I suddenly heard a hollow voice behind my back.

I whirled round—and saw my trusty first mate crawling out of the coal bin. He looked terrible, black, unshaven, and as thin as a rake. And yet it was him. I all but fainted with surprise.

We hugged each other, of course. Fooks even shed a tear. We attended to the furnaces together, Lom making short work of Fooks’s difficulty, and then sat down to listen to the story of his misadventures.

The newspapers gave a more or less correct account of the happenings, except that it had been no raid and no propaganda trick, of course, just the trick of the wind. Well, after the

tremors subsided, Lom came down into the city. He had been badly scared by the police, and he walked along warily, casting apprehensive glances about him. And the set-up was not reassuring. There were droves of policemen all over the place.

Perhaps he might have made it to the port had not he lost his nerve. Without noticing it he began to quicken his steps and soon broke into a run.

Well, that started a hue and cry. He looked back and saw a crowd running after him—policemen, boys, dogs and mere pedestrians.

Naturally, he ran towards the sea. He managed to reach the coal wharf ahead of his pursuers and dug himself into coal.

And at that time the trader we were on began loading coal. They used a rope-drive for the purpose, scooping up coal into buckets and overturning them over the ship's hold.

So Lom was scooped up too. He tried to jump out of the bucket, thinking it was his pursuers who had dug him out, but the bucket was already on the way and soon he was hurtled into the bunker.

He felt his arms and legs, found them whole and decided to use this opportunity to catch up on sleep.

And so he had been sleeping in the coal until he heard me call his name.

Well, things had worked out in the best possible way. The crew of the *Rage* was reunited and we could now think of a way of reaching home. Soon our watch ended. It occurred to me that while Fooks and I were shipwreck victims protected by the law of the sea, Lom was, in the first place, a stowaway and, in the second, a wanted criminal. Who could tell what view the captain would take of the situation? For all we knew, he might decide to turn him over to the Japanese or Canadian

Longitude
Latitude

EVENTS

Port
registrations

Lom suddenly emerged from
a coal fiss.



authorities. Just try and rescue him from their clutches! So I advised Lom to stay put in the hold.

"After all," I reasoned, "you are used to it. We shall be bringing you food, and we shall stand watch together. It will be easier on us as well. And safer."

Lom was quite willing.

"I don't mind," he said, "but I'll be bored. I've had all the sleep I need and I can't imagine what I can do in the darkness to make the time pass quicker."

"Why," I said, "there are all kinds of things. You can compose verse, or count to a million—incidentally, it helps against insomnia."

"And may I sing, Captain?"

"Well, I would not recommend it," I replied, "but if you must, sing to yourself."

Well, Fooks and I went off the watch, and Lom dived back into the bunker. Before we had spent five minutes airing ourselves on the deck, out dashed the stokers, the watch that had relieved us, frightened out of their wits.

"What's wrong?" I asked them.

"There's some kind of goblin set house in the bunker down below. It wails like a siren, it's real creepy."

I understood at once what it was all about.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I'll go down and see."

Down I went, and indeed it was creepy: the melody was like nothing on earth, the words were barely intelligible, and the voice—it was horrible. I once heard elephants trumpeting on Ceylon, well, let me tell you that was like angels singing in heaven compared to this noise.

Of course it was Lom singing. As I started digging my way through the coal towards him, the words became clearer.

Then I tumbled to it that again I had overlooked Lom's propensity for taking orders literally. I told him to sing to himself and that was what he was doing:

*Poor Lom, you unfortunate fellow,
First mate of the corvette called Rage
You sit in the coal-bin and bellow,
Bewailing your ship's sorry fate.*

That was what he called "singing to himself", dense fellow. But why "corvette", I ask you. On the other hand, one is entitled to poetic licence in a song, it was not a report or bill of lading. Still, I cut Lom short.

"You got me wrong, Lom," I told him. "When I told you to sing to yourself, I meant that you should do it soundlessly, so that nobody could hear you. You've frightened the pants off the stokers. You don't want to be discovered, do you?"

"No," he said. "I'd better count to a million then."

I went up and said to the stokers that it had been merely the flames wailing in the furnace. The mechanic sided with me, saying such phenomena do happen.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

*in which Fooks and Lom make unfortunate purchases,
and Wrungel has a chance to verify some algebraic rules*

At last we put into port in Canada. Fooks and I thanked the captain, took leave of him and went ashore. As for Lom, we managed to smuggle him on shore the next night. The three of us took a table in a quiet tavern and began discussing our further plans. We finally decided that the shortest cut home would be by land: from Canada to Alaska, then across the Bering Strait and we would be in Chukotka. There we'll find a way. So far so good. But what about the means of conveyance? It was winter in Canada, the rivers were frozen over, there was no railway connection with Alaska and it was too cold for a car trip. Boats would not be running there until next spring.

We decided that we must buy ourselves a sled and some draught animals—either a reindeer or a dog team. I went to look for a sled, Lom went in search of a reindeer and Fooks volunteered to buy dogs.

I bought a very good sled—big, strong and handsome. Lom was not so lucky. His deer looked a bit scrawny, had a

spotted coat and, as experts said, his hooves were too narrow.

We decided to try it out, harnessed it to the sled and urged it on with shouts of "Gidding-up!" But the deer was no pacer. On snow it put up a more or less decent performance but on river ice it stalled for good. Its legs kept slipping every which way.

I saw that it needed to be shod if we wanted to get anywhere. But where were we to find deer-shoes?

At this point the letter board I had taken off the yacht came in handy. I had not been lugging it along for nothing after all. We prized off the brass letters and used the very same screws to attach them to the deer's hooves. It helped as far as the drift went, but the lazy animal still refused to run properly.

Then Fooks came with his purchase. It was a smallish dog with a pointed muzzle, which, the papers attested, was a prize-winning dog-team leader. Well, we decided we shall harness it in the lead, as a lookout, so to speak.

But putting the couple between the shafts did not prove easy. It wasn't so bad with the deer—we slipped our ring-buoy on its neck instead of a collar (so the buoy came in handy too). But the dog snarled and snapped, and there was no managing it.

Still we got the better of it in the end. We made it a shaft-bow, dragged it between the shafts and let go.

You should have seen the rumpus that followed! The deer hit out with its forelegs and shook its horns, the dog growled and yelped and tried to turn round, and as a result the team was moving backwards at a fair pace.

I wondered if we should set on our way back astern, so to speak, but decided to try and switch their places first. They say in algebra that the order in which the numbers are is immaterial, but here the rule was proved wrong. As soon as we reversed our animals, the deer shot ahead like a blue streak and the dog gave chaise, gnashing his teeth and howling but also pulling like a locomotive.

Lom and I barely managed to tumble into the sled, while Fooks clutched at a rope and was dragged along in this fashion like an ice anchor for half a mile.

That was some race, let me tell you. I did not have a log with me to measure the speed, and anyway it wouldn't have been much use on ice. But judging by the objects on the river bank, the speed was terrific. Villages flashed past in a blur, the sled jolted on ice-humps, the wind whistled in our ears.

Steam gushed forth from the deer's nostrils, its hooves typed out in a staccatto like an Underwood typewriter: R-A-G-E.

The dog kept up with it, its tongue lolling.

Before we knew where we were we reached the frontier of Alaska. I saw sheriffs with guns and flags and decided to brake—after all one had to observe the formalities while crossing a border. So I shouted to my team:

“Ease off there! Whoa!”

But there was no stopping my deer, it just cantered along at top speed.

At this point a sheriff waved a handkerchief, the others shot a volley... I thought they were shooting at us and fell flat on the bottom of the sled. But no, nobody seemed hurt and we raced ahead. In another five minutes we overtook a



We race across
Canada in a deer-
sleigh.

Horns

Wolf -
- formerly husky

dog team, then another two and then I stopped counting – there were so many. The drivers urged their teams for all they were worth, while I would have been quite happy to go slowly, but there was no holding my pair of pacers. Soon Fort Yukon appeared round the bend. I saw a crowd of people on the ice of the river, shouting, waving and shooting into the air. They stamped and jumped so violently that the ice began to cave in.

The crowd parted and I saw a huge ice hole dead ahead. We were approaching it at breakneck speed. Seeing that the situation was critical, I leaned the sled sideways, the shafts broke and the entire crew was dumped into the snow. The deer, meantime, could not stop itself in time and fell into the water, harness, dog and all.

They might have drowned too, but the buoy kept them on the surface. I jumped up to see them swimming and snorting.

Then some volunteer helpers brought a lasso, caught the deer by the horns and pulled. And what do you think? The vaunted adornment of a noble animal became detached and under them we saw short cow-like horns. These luckily were securely fastened, and the team was pulled out on the ice. The deer shook itself, licked its nostrils and suddenly gave a mournful moo.

Goodness! I looked closer and saw that it actually *was* a cow minus tail. Lom had been swindled in Canada. No wonder it had been helpless on ice. But how it had developed such uncharacteristic speed I only understood after talking to some dog-experts. It appeared Fooks had been cheated as well and instead of a husky they had palmed off a young wolf on him.

Mind you: a young wolf is not much good as a dog; a cow is not much good as a deer, but together they made a record-breaking team. Here algebra was vindicated; if the two numbers have a negative sign, the result is positive.

Well, when all was under control again, we found out the reason for the crowd and the shooting. They had the traditional winter race on that day and we, unwittingly, won the first prize.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

*the last, in which Admiral Kusaki himself helps Wrungel
out of an awkward situation*

We spent two days in the Yukon, resting ourselves and giving our animals a chance to restore their strength. Our hospitable hosts said we were free to do what we liked provided we did not leave the hotel. To see that we did not go AWOL, they posted two plainclothesmen by our door. On the third day we harnessed our animals and went on our way. We shot through the Yukon in a couple of hours, reached the Bering Strait and set course for Chukotka. The going was good as far as St. Lawrence Island, but there we ran into a stretch of broken ice and got stuck before a wide crack.

We pitched camp on ice, waiting for the ice-fields to drift together again. We had no special reason to hurry, as we had a large stock of pemmican, fish and frozen hazel-grouse. And then there was the milk from the cow. In short, there was no danger of starvation, but we did suffer from cold. There was no firewood, and we sat huddled together for warmth, shivering. Fooks was more afflicted than the rest of us: his moustache and whiskers were a mass of icicles, and

he kept whining and complaining. Lom was not much better off.

I saw something had to be done to warm up the crew. I sat there recalling various kinds of fuel. Firewood, coal, kerosene—we had no chance of getting hold of those. Then I remembered a conjurer in a circus who brought water to a boil by just looking at it fixedly.

Why not try it? After all I had an iron will and probably a magnetic gaze too. I fixed my eyes on a block of ice. Nothing happened. It did not even melt. It became clear to me that what I had seen in that circus was merely a trick, a hocus-pocus. Let me think, what does it remind me of? Hocus, pocus, focus... Eureka! As soon as I thought of focus a brilliant idea was born in my mind.

I snatched an axe and began to shape the block of ice into a lens.

“Come on, lads!” I told my crew. “Let’s set up this here gadget.”

Lom rose grumbling:

“What’s the point of playing with blocks of ice, Captain? Isn’t it cold enough as it is?”

Fooks was resentful too.

“Gadgets! In the Red Sea I was warm in my mere shorts, gadgets or no gadgets, and here I’ve put on three pairs and my teeth never stop rattling. Give me a gadget to keep my jaws in place.”

“Stop the chatter!” I shouted. “Listen to my command! Raise the block of ice! Steady there! Five degrees port! A bit more...”

And what do you think! They raised the huge magnifying glass I had shaped out of a block of ice, focussed the sun

rays on ice underfoot and in a matter of seconds the pencil of rays started boring a hole in the ice, with steam bursting out with a whistle.

We focussed the rays on our tea-kettle and it came to a boil in no time, even the lid was blown off it. In this way we had got the better of the cold. Now life became quite bearable. We fed the wolf on pemmican and the cow on hay, and all the five of us were quite comfortable. Before long the icefloes drifted together again.

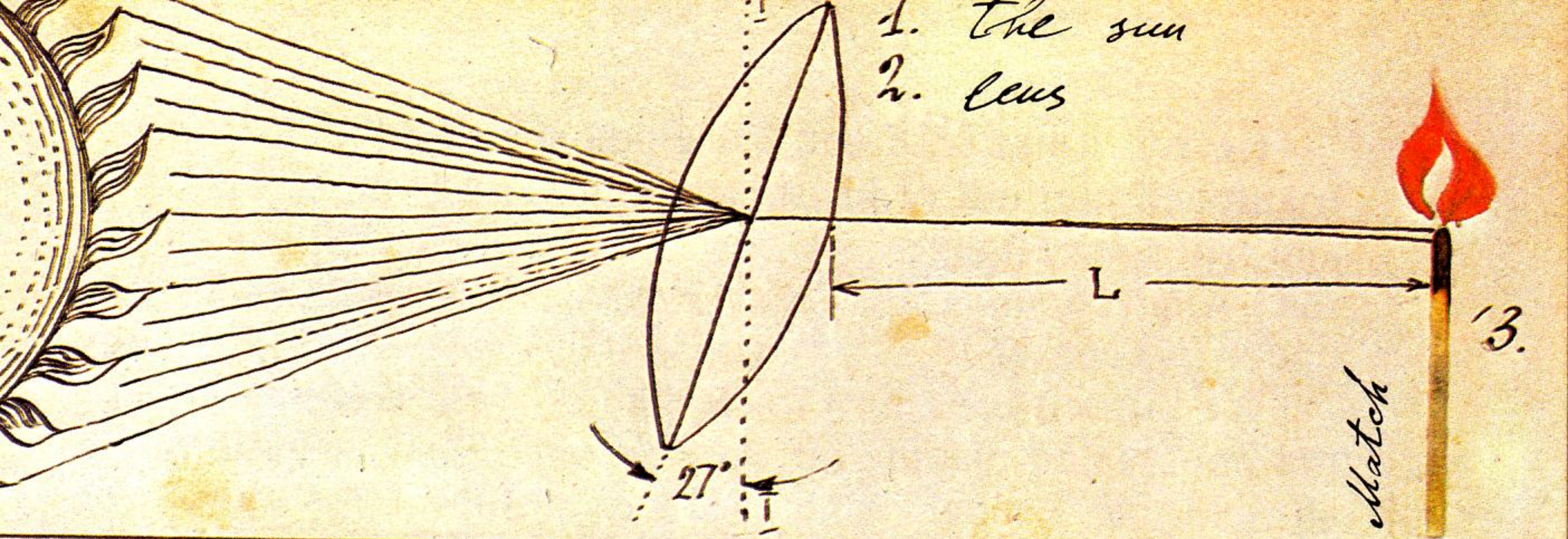
Then we harnessed our pacers and started on the last lap of our journey, making straight for Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka.

Upon arrival we presented ourselves to the local authorities. I must tell you that they gave us a really smashing welcome. It appeared they had all been following our trip by newspaper reports, and had been quite worried the last few days, when our tracks had become lost in the Arctic. They could not do enough for us, feeding us fit to burst, showing us about, the local residents vying for the honour to see us as guests in their homes. We unshod the cow and gave it to the local animal farm, and as for the wolf, we made a gift of it to the kids for their school menagerie... In other words, life was just great.

Then spring came, the ice broke up and we began to pine for the sea. Every morning we went to the seashore to hunt seals, to fish or just to gaze at the ocean.

One day, as the three of us were strolling down the seashore, Fooks decided to climb a hill. Suddenly I heard him yelling in a terrible voice:

“Look, Captain, there she is, the *Rage*! Aw-aw-aw! There she is!”



He yelled like mad and I decided something must have frightened him out of his senses. Lom and I ran to his help, and when we emerged, panting, on top of the hill, we saw—what do you think?—the *Rage* bearing down on us under full canvas.

We hurried back into town. People were pouring out of the houses and making for the harbour. They let us through all right, but I caught quite a few doubtful looks.

I did not understand anything. How could it be? The *Rage* had sunk before my very eyes. Moreover, there was a notation to this effect in the log—that was a document after all, not just an eye-witness story. Fooks was there too, he could confirm it all. And now it looked as though I had deserted my boat in a moment of danger. “We’ll see,” I told myself. “We’ll find out what it’s all about when she comes nearer.”

Well, when she did, things, far from clearing, became puzzling in the extreme. For at the helm stood another Lom, while another Fooks was on the ropes. And by the mast stood another Wrungel giving commands.

“Impossible,” I said to myself. “It cannot be. Is that really I?” I looked. Yes, none other. Then perhaps this person on the embankment was not I? I felt my stomach—it was certainly mine. “What the hell is happening?” I wondered. “A case of split personality? Or am I dreaming?”

“Lom,” I said, “pinch me, please.”

I could see Lom was dumbfounded too.

But he did pinch me all the same, and so hard that I gave a yelp.

This drew everybody’s attention to us. A circle formed round Lom, Fooks and me.

"Perhaps you will be so kind as to explain the situation, Captain?"

Meanwhile the *Rage* was putting in in the best style. Here they hanged out the fenders, tossed the sandbag end and lay alongside. My double saluted and made a bow.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said. "Captain Wrungel and crew. In conclusion of my global cruise I have brought my yacht to the port of Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka..."

The public on the embankment cheered, while I just stood there gaping.

Let me tell you that I am not a believer in the supernatural, but I was now wondering whether I was seeing ghosts. And cheeky ghosts too.

What was more, my position was stupid in the extreme. If *that* was Wrungel, who was I? A fraud, an impostor? "Steady there!" I commanded to myself, "Let's see what happens next."

The three of them came ashore. I tried to elbow my way through towards them, but the throng was very thick. However, I could hear somebody telling the second Wrungel that there was another man in Petropavlovsk who claimed he was Wrungel.

"Nonsense!" he blurted out. "There cannot be any Wrungel here—I had sunk his boat in the Pacific!"

Then everything became clear to me. So it was my old friend Admiral Hamura Kusaki doubling for me.

I pushed my way over with my crew, came up to him and said:

"Greetings, Admiral! How was the trip?"

He stood aghast. Meanwhile Lom came up to his double, swung his fist and gave him a mighty cuff. The other Lom

toppled down and we all saw stilts sticking out of his trouser legs.

This added courage to Fooks, who fell on Fooks number two, snatched at his beard and tore it off.

Well, those two had clear distinguishing characteristics, one his height, and the other his beard. But how was I to unmask my double?

While I was racking my brains, he solved my problem himself. Seeing his fraud had been exposed, he snatched out his dirk, took it in both hands and in the twinkling of an eye ripped open his belly. Harakiri, a Samurai's honourable exit. I closed my eyes shut. Whatever you say, young man, but my nerves are not up to such spectacles.

There I stood, my eyes screwed shut, when suddenly I heard the people around starting to giggle and then breaking into loud guffaws. I opened my eyes and was again nonplussed. The sky was clear, the sun was shining, and yet there was snow whirling in the air.

But then I noticed that my double had grown noticeably thinner. He stood there very much alive, and feathers were tumbling out of his open belly and were caught up by the breeze.

They took the dirk away from him and courteously escorted him to prison. And his crew with him. The three of us found ourselves surrounded by a cheering crowd. When the delight of the onlookers subsided, we went to have a look at the yacht.

Of course it was not my *Rage*, but it looked very much like it. I might even have confused it with the original *Rage*, had I not known every crack in its planking.

Well, the boat was registered at the port properly, and the



te
x

Longitude
Latitude

E V E N T S

Post
registrations

158° east long.
54° north lat.

Lam
Number
Two.

Fooks Number Two

Wungol Number
Two performs
a harakiri.

Beard

of Fooks Number
Two.

next day the long-awaited steamer arrived from Vladivostok.

We said goodbye all round, and Fooks and I left Petropavlovsk. As you see, I am still hale and hearty. Fooks has mended his ways and now plays scoundrels in films. His appearance is just right for such roles.

As for Lom, he remained in Petropavlovsk and assumed command of the yacht.

I had several letters from him. He wrote that he was pleased with the yacht. It was not a patch on the original *Rage* of course, but good enough. That's how it is.

Well, young man, you've had the story. Asking me whether I went out to sea! Sure I went out to sea, my dear sir. I sailed the oceans far and wide. My memory has been failing of late, or I could tell you a thing or two.

The Author's Afterword

CAPTAIN WRUNGEL, THE FABULOUS FIBBER

A long time ago I worked in the Far Eastern whaling firm, which was headed by Andrei Vassilievich Vronsky, a quite remarkable person in many ways.

When a young man, Vronsky and his school-mate and friend Ivan Alexandrovich Mann conceived the idea of performing a global cruise on a sailing yacht. The two friends found an old yacht, mapped out their route, studied the sailing directions, in fact, planned their voyage down to the smallest detail. However, for a number of reasons, the cruise did not materialise. The yacht was never launched and rotted on shore, the maps and sailing directions were eventually lost, but Vronsky, now a mature sailor, would not relinquish his dreams about adventures which had never come to pass.

Sometimes of an evening, Andrei Vronsky would share those dreams with his friends presenting them as amusing yarns, in which accurate knowledge of seamanship rubbed shoulders with outrageous invention.

Vronsky would tell his cock-and-bull stories with a

perfectly straight face, speaking ponderously, his voice and gestures full of importance. His speech was liberally garnished with nautical terms, and interspersed with phrases like "Let me tell you" and "Though I say it myself". He invariably addressed his listeners as "young man".

During the telling of his fibs, Vronsky changed amazingly in manner, voice timbre and even outer appearance. Before us was an old salt, a seasoned captain sharing his rich sailing experiences with trustful young listeners and unable to resist the temptation to occasionally embroider the truth.

Several years later, when I was already in Moscow and working with the wonderful writer Boris Zhitkov on a very tricky book, I remembered those yarns of Vronsky's. One night, during a short rest from our labours, I told him a few of them. Boris Stepanovich was greatly amused. Then his face grew serious.

"I say, why don't you write a story about an old sea captain who adorns his accounts of his seafaring adventures with an occasional fib?"

The word of Zhitkov, my mentor in literature, carried a lot of weight. I began to ponder the idea. It was then, on December 22, 1934, at four o'clock in the morning (we had been working through the night) that sea captain Christopher Wrungel was born.

To be sure, on that day I did not yet know the name of my future hero, nor how he would look, in what ship he would sail and what crew would be under his command. All I knew was that the story would be based on Vronsky's yarns about his imaginary global cruise.

When I left Zhitkov's place in the morning, my mind was

already hard at work on my future story. I was trying to visualize my captain, to conceive a life-like portrait of him.

I began with the name. Now, the name Vronsky begins with the same letters as the Russian verb meaning “to lie”. Naturally I could not give my hero the name of a well-known and respected person. But it would be a good idea to find a name containing the same root.

I thought of other famous liars in literature and of course remembered Münchausen. The name itself was of no help whatever, but Münchausen’s title – baron – reminded me of yet another baron – Ferdinand Wrangel, a distinguished sailor whose name was given to a large island in Eastern Arctic. His name easily rendered itself to a certain manipulation, which was very effective in Russian indeed. By substituting the letter “a” for “u” in his name I obtained Wrungel, *wrun* meaning “liar” in Russian. Now my hero had a family name, and to call him Christopher, after one of the world’s most famous explorers, was the most natural thing to do.

I fashioned the second character of the story, Wrungel’s first mate, after Vronsky’s friend Mann, as he portrayed him in his yarns – a hulking big chap of kindly disposition, painstakingly diligent but rather dull-witted. I wasted no time on inventing a name for him, but merely translated his name Mann, meaning “man”, from German into French – l’homme. Of course I simplified the spelling to Lom. When I needed a third member of the crew, I copied him from a sailor I had known who was actually called Fooks. He had been with the Soviet Union’s first whaling flotilla on its passage from Leningrad to the Far East. He was little in stature, wore a beard, was something of a cheat and was

eternally landing in various fixes. His mates loved to poke fun at him.

So the crew had been picked. It was time to launch the yacht on its voyage. I sat down at my desk, pen in hand. The work proceeded at a good pace, and six months later I had roughly about a quarter of the book ready. But I had run out of Vronsky's yarns. This did not dismay me however. Ever since that day when I stepped on the deck of a fishing trawler, a young landlubber, I had kept a diary. It contained records of quite a few funny incidents I witnessed, as well as amusing yarns I heard from my comrades. More important, as I re-read my diaries, I lived anew, as it were, through my experiences on various ships and at various longitudes and latitudes. Details came to my mind which one simply cannot invent without having seen them with one's own eyes. These details gave my fibs the ring of truth and this is very important for a book consisting of a pack of lies. One must lie persuasively.

When I had exhausted my diaries, I made a mental trip into my childhood. There too, I found a lot of amusing incidents. I remembered my old friends, myself, and this helped me to look at the events in my books through the eyes of a child, so to speak.

I also found the idea for the boat's name in my childhood recollections. One day my father took me for a jaunt on a pleasure boat called *Daryal*. This is the name of a famous canyon in North Caucasus. During the mooring the ship struck its stern against the landing stage, and the last letter was knocked off its name making it "Darya", a very common woman's name in Russia. This caused a lot of hilarity on the landing stage, and I decided to borrow this single device for

my book. So my yacht is originally christened *Courage* and then becomes *Rage*.

Finally the manuscript was completed and I offered it to the editors of a children's magazine *Pioneer*. The manuscript was accepted but on a condition which was very disappointing for me. They decided to print the story in the shape of captions to large pictures, each almost the size of an entire page.

I could not imagine how I was going to reduce an episode to 15 lines of print and also fit in the description of characters and their relationships, the attending circumstances, and, moreover, to tie up one episode with the next. But I was so eager to see my story in print that I agreed to try and abridge the manuscript.

Today, when I re-read *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel* it seems to me that it would not be all that hard to select the most necessary words and phrases. But then, when I sat down to the job of abridging the book, it was an unending battle for every word, sometimes for a single letter. Seeking out the tersest phrases, I would sweat for hours crossing out words, writing in others, then crossing out these as well. Words put up a desperate resistance, and I was in a state bordering on despair. I thought I would never cope with this task, and if, at the end of the day, I had succeeded in getting rid of two or three lines without detriment to the story, I thought I had achieved a lot.

When, as the result of this back-breaking toil, I reduced the first twenty-five pages to five, I showed my work to Zhitkov. He approved the result, and I then believed in myself and managed to convince the editors that I would be able to do the job. So *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel* was included

in the magazine's plan for 1937. Now was the time to select the artist and commission the illustrations.

Both the editors and myself were eager to have the story illustrated by the artist Konstantin Rotov, who was then at the peak of his fame, painting posters, illustrating books and working on an illustrated magazine. He accepted the commission in principle, but, being swamped with work, just could not find half an hour for a short meeting, to say nothing of a thorough discussion of the future book. Both my editor and myself phoned him times without number, and every time Rotov said: "Call me in a couple of weeks. Perhaps I'll be less busy then." Two weeks would pass, and it would be the same story all over again. Time passed, deadlines were within sight. Then I employed a stratagem. I cornered Rotov in the canteen of the publishing house, sat down at his desk, and in between sausages and coffee told him the plot of the story.

At first he refused to listen, then became interested, but it all ended with the same words about "calling in a couple of weeks". However, taking leave of me, he wrote down my telephone number.

I came home in a foul mood. It looked as though Rotov was not to be counted on, and it was too late to seek another artist. Suddenly the telephone rang. It was Rotov inviting me to come over to discuss the illustrations.

I still remember that meeting down to the minutest detail. There was a very good radio set in Rotov's little studio, heaped with studies and ready work, which Rotov kept on all the time. He liked to have music playing while he worked, and our entire conversation was conducted against the background of subdued music.

Rotov sat, pencil in hand, asking me searchingly about the design of a yacht and its handling. I told him all I could think of about my characters, their appearance, age, background, habits, preferences, etc. Rotov drew on small sheets of vellum, erasing and drawing again, and gradually I saw my heroes emerging on those sheets, with faces, arms, legs, clothes, characteristic postures.

Towards the end of that session, which lasted several hours, I saw my yacht *Rage* and her crew such as they were seen, two months later, by thousands of young readers. I also saw that I had been quite right having set my heart on Rotov as the illustrator. Since his time many artists in the Soviet Union and abroad illustrated the book, but some of Rotov's initial ideas survived in all of them. For this edition the artist Georgy Yudin made new coloured illustrations, executed in a very different manner, and yet some of Rotov's graphic finds are to be found here. For example, the scene depicting the "penguin lift" is almost a replica of Rotov's composition.

"Wrungel" was published by the magazine serially, six episodes in every issue. Rotov and I worked together for a whole year and became good friends. A brilliant and knowledgeable man, Rotov was endowed with infectious good spirits and a sharp eye for the comical. He had a knack for finding small, apparently insignificant details, which enhanced not only the comical effect of his pictures but also their veracity.

My association with him taught me to pay attention to details, and sometimes I actually borrowed Rotov's finds and incorporated them into the story.

Here is one instance:

After discussing the "English" chapter and agreeing about everything, we went our different ways: he—to a holiday home to draw the illustrations, and I—to the North on business.

When I came back, the issue had already been signed for the press. As I looked through the signed sheets, my attention was drawn to a picture in which Wrungel and his crew were knocking out corks from soda-water bottles. I was struck by a new detail Rotov had found since: seagulls hit by the corks dropping into the sea. The excellent detail simply asked to be included in the text, but it was too late. Anyway, there was no space for an extra sentence. But when, two years later, the story was brought out in book form, the sentence about seagulls was included in the chapter.

There were many more instances like this.

That year was a happy one for me. We laughed a lot together, Rotov and I, rejoicing in our finds and resenting the strict deadlines. We never seemed to have enough time.

The reaction of the reading public was fervent and contradictory. The magazine was inundated with letters from the young readers, not always free of spelling mistakes, but invariably sincere and enthusiastic. As often as not the letters were actually addressed to Captain Wrungel.

However, there were a different sort of letters, too, usually from adults. Their authors would protest, for example, against Wrungel's eternal pipe, which was a bad example for the children, against Lom's love of drink, and against the erroneous information in geography, physics and other subjects which the author dished out to the children.

These attacks could not but affect the editors. On their insistence, Fooks was transformed from a cardsharp into a master of card tricks, which, however, had little effect on his character and behaviour. There were more telling losses as well. The Japanese chapter caused such misgivings to the editors that they decided to discontinue the publication of the story. The November issue of the magazine came out minus "Wrungel". But the stream of indignant letters from children, who demanded to be told about the fates of the intrepid captain, made the editors change their minds and publish the end of the story in the December issue.

Be it as it may, lopped up and abridged but "Wrungel" saw the light of day. Now I got the commission of preparing the story for publication in book form.

I imagined the restoration of the text which had remained outside the captions would be easy pie. I could not be more wrong. Extreme brevity had become a characteristic feature of the book's style, and any attempt to mechanically restore the omitted comments, dialogues, nature descriptions, etc., as they were in the initial variant resulted in patchwork effect. Insertions stuck out a mile and seemed to belong to the pen of a different author.

So I had to rewrite the story practically all but anew. This work took up a whole year. Rotov meantime designed a beautiful cover, a coloured inset and a head-piece. The book was going to be very attractive indeed.

The editor of the first book publication gave me a free hand. We restored the chapter which had been omitted in the magazine variant, and corrected all the changes in the text which I considered undesirable. The book came

out in the spring of 1939 in the printing of 25 thousand copies.

Rotov and I, as well as all of Wrungel's friends, and he had made quite a few friends by that time, awaited the verdict of the critics. We did not have to wait long. The July issue of an influential magazine carried two critical reviews of *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel* at once. The author of one of them promised the book a long and happy life, the author of the other denied it the right to existence in book form, classified its publication as a major calamity and predicted Wrungel an inglorious demise and speedy oblivion.

In the years that followed many came to think that the second reviewer was more clairvoyant. The book, though not forgotten, was not reprinted. It seemed Wrungel was really dead for the readers. But no, he lived on in the hopes of his faithful friends, who believed that he would yet set sail and reach the harbour of library shelves.

And their faith was justified. Exactly twenty years after the first publication Konstantin Rotov designed a new cover for *The Adventures of Captain Wrungel*, and another six months later 200 thousand copies of the book appeared in bookshops.

The short foreword to the 1958 edition said the book had been considerably altered. It is not true. The story remained essentially as it was, with only the addition of Wrungel's dissertations on time and seafaring and several minor alterations necessitated by the enormous changes which had occurred in the world in the intervening twenty years.

So, having weathered all vicissitudes, both predicted and unpredicted, Captain Wrungel sailed on with fair wind. The

book's printing in Russian has topped the one millionth mark. It came out in translation in many of the Soviet Union's national republics and abroad—in Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, India, Japan and many other countries. Now it is being issued in English. I hope that English children, too, will be delighted with the preposterous fibs of the kindly old captain, and that I will have not laboured on the book in vain.

